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MORTAL KOMBAT

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT FROM A MARIO GAME?

DARRAN JONES

There's something truly satisfying about sliding down that flagpole. It never gets boring, no matter what *Mario* game I'm playing.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Maximo*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Shooting him in *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*. He makes a noise and you get some health.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *The Lamplighters League*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

There's a pill-shaped glass planet early in *Super Mario Galaxy*, and once you break into it there's a whole 2D platforming challenge with gravity-reversing effects inside. It's a very, very clever bit of design.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: MotorStorm
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Playing *Mario Kart* on the SNES and thinking, this game is OK… for a *Mario* game.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Total War: Rome Remastered - RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

There's a feeling of sheer joy when you first get Mario's raccoon costume in *Super Mario Bros 3*, take a long sprint and then launch into the air, grabbing coins as you go.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Ridge Racer 6*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ANDREW FISHER

Completing *Yoshi's Island* and defeating the giant Bowser. There's so many great moments in that game.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: Recovering from major surgery…
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

GRAEME MASON

Playing *Super Mario Land* on a long flight from the UK to Cyprus in the early Nineties on my brand-new Game Boy.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Starfield*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

DAVID CROOKES

It has to be the first time Mario took to the air after picking up the Cape Feather which was a lovely surprise.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Return To Monkey Island*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

IAIN LEE

A slight cheat but… my favourite bit in any *Mario* game was beating Miyamoto at *Super Mario Bros*. He was much more gracious than I was!
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *We Were Here Together*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

LOADING...

I first experienced *Super Mario Bros* on a NES in my local Boots. Although I wouldn't get to own a copy of the game until many years later, I'd regularly play it whenever I could. *Super Mario World* was the first *Mario* game I bought, while *Super Mario 64* wowed me as much as everyone else who played it, so I bought that as well. In short, I quite like *Mario* games.

This month we speak to several industry veterans who break down the mechanics and elements that have helped turn Mario into a household name, from the way he controls, to the series' excellent music. If you're a longtime fan of the popular plumber you won't want to miss it.

Other highlights in this issue include a look at the games of First Star Software with Richard Spitalny, the creation of *The Lost Patrol* with designer Ian Harling and an in-depth interview with Clive Townsend about starting his gaming career on the ZX Spectrum and his recent return to the popular home micro. We've also got excellent guides to *Katamari Damacy* and *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure*, a legacy article on the popular *Mortal Kombat* series, as well as a look at some of Psygnosis' obscure PlayStation games. Oh, and don't forget our amazing subs offer on page 30 where you can get hold of TheC64 Mini.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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A Tribute To: First Star Software
Richard Spitalny looks back at the big hits and hidden gems of the studio he cofounded

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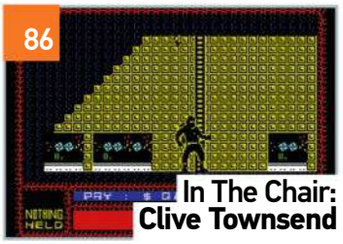
Ultimate Guide: Katamari Damacy

Roll up! Roll up! Lewis Packwood wants to tell you about Namco's delightfully absurd PS2 gem



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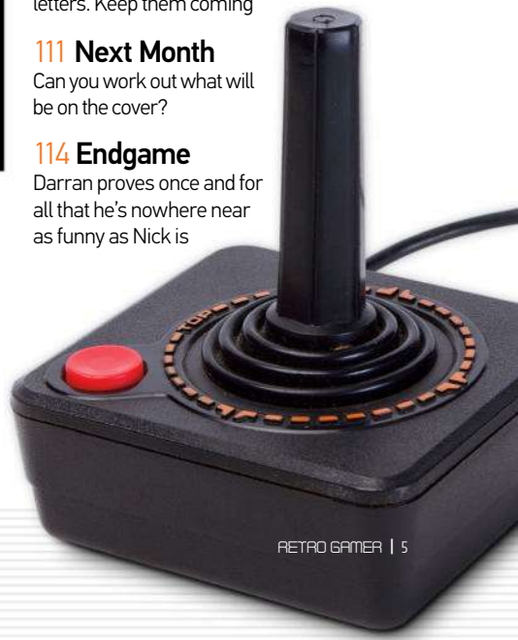

» [Switch] Lara takes on a many-armed monster in a remaster of her first three adventures.

NINTENDO'S RETRO GEMS

Faith Johnson on the remakes, remasters and reimagined games that were shown at the latest Nintendo Direct

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The latest Direct from Nintendo is stuffed with retro goodness

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Nick lands in March 2007 and discovers lots of gaming goodness

Nintendo has struck gold with its constant supply of Directs that keep eager gamers up to date with everything happening in the world of the popular publisher. The latest appeared on 14 September and featured a mix of remasters, remakes and retro collections coming to the Switch. There were also important updates to some previously announced titles.

By far the biggest news came in the final segment of the Direct with a remaster of *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* being confirmed for a 2024 release. First released on GameCube in 2004, it was acclaimed by gamers and critics, winning several awards. The new graphics look excellent, and it will be interesting to see if any enhancements to the original gameplay will be implemented.

» [Switch] *Princess Peach: Showtime!* sees the popular princess play a pirate and many other stage characters.

> "The first three Tomb Raiders are getting a graphic overhaul and will include all the expansion packs"

Another exciting announcement was Nintendo shadow-dropping *F-Zero 99*, the next instalment in its popular online series that reimagines classic games. It's a hectic take on the series with 99 players racing on a single track, all vying for the top position. A new mechanic, called Sparks, grants access to a secret overhead skyway that gives a huge advantage over the other racers. Any Switch owner with an active online subscription is able to play *F-Zero 99* for free right now.

The first new game announcement was that *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* is being remade for the Switch and is set for release on 16 February 2024. First released on the GBA in 2004, it features updated graphics and a local co-op mode. We'll be watching this closely to see if it keeps the tight puzzle platforming that made the original so much fun to play.

A big announcement from the last Direct was the *Super Mario RPG* remake. Updates to this much-anticipated release included confirmation that the Quick-Time Event mechanic will return and that you can damage all on-screen enemies with a perfectly timed attack. Footage showed a Super Gauge as well that builds during combat and unleashes a devastating Triple Move once it is filled.

Another big update was the news that Peach's new game will be called *Princess Peach: Showtime!* and will be released 22 March 2024. The story revolves around Peach and her friend Stella trying to claim back the stage so they can save their theatre. Peach will use magic ribbons to transform into different stage characters, which each have

» [Switch] *Contra* gets back to its 2D roots in *Operation Garuga*.

» [Switch] Mario teams up with his friends for a Triple Move in his RPG remaster.

distinct abilities, in order to take down the evil Grape and her Sour Bunch lackies.

The final update on previously announced games was for the upcoming *Luigi's Mansion 2 HD* due next summer. New footage showed superb lighting effects that create a perfectly creepy atmosphere and online multiplayer modes that allow you to capture ghosts in teams of up to four hunters. A *Luigi's Mansion*/*Ghostbusters* crossover anyone?

Further news of remakes came in the form of *Another Code: Recollection*. The original game released as *Another Code: Two Memories* on the Nintendo DS. The cult game tells the story of Ashley Robbins who is searching for her father after he mysteriously disappears. As well as all-new graphics, the 2009 Wii sequel, *A Journey Into Lost Memories*, is also included, nicely rounding out Ashley's story. The new double pack is out 19 January 2024.

There were also updates and new announcements for games that will be available on other platforms besides the Switch. *Contra: Operation Galuga* is a reimagining of the hit game that will see the series go back to its side-scrolling roots. It will be interesting to see if *Contra* can get back to its best after its last title, the disappointing twin-stick shooter *Contra: Rogue Corps*.

One of the more exciting multiformat announcements was *Tomb Raider I-III Remastered Starring Lara Croft*. The first three *Tomb Raiders* are getting a graphic overhaul in this remaster and will include all the expansion packs as well as secret levels. There is also an option to switch the graphics back to the original polygons for that authentic feel when this is released 14 February 2024.

First announced in June 2023, there was also new footage shown of Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown* that included a boss fight and glimpses of new abilities to use. The 2.5D action platformer seems to take a lot of inspiration from the original game and is coming to consoles and PC 18 January 2024.

The Switch is still going strong with Nintendo remaining focussed on bringing new games mixed in with restorations and reimagined updates of its older titles. Many will ask how long this can last before a new console is announced but for now, we have plenty of new Nintendo titles to enjoy in the coming months and into next year.

» [Switch] It may not be a brand-new *F-Zero* game but *F-Zero 99* will certainly do for now.

» [Switch] Luigi switches on the lights and gleams in the new HD remaster.

» [Switch] The Direct's biggest surprise was a new remaster of *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door*.

LIMITED RUN GAMES FINDS A WAY

There were roars and rumbles from *Jurassic Park* fans when the Mega Drive versions were missing from Limited Run Games' *Jurassic Park: Classic Games Collection* that it announced earlier this year. In response to fan demand the publisher has now confirmed that two Mega Drive titles will also be included when the collection releases. We'll keep our fingers crossed for the epic Mega-CD game.

TATSUJIN HAVE TOAPLANS

Japanese publisher Tatsujin has recently announced three new games coming soon to a variety of platforms. The Snow Bros are back after being on ice for 30 years in a new adventure titled *Wonderland*, while *Truxton Extreme* promises to build on the gameplay that made the original shmup an arcade classic. And finally, a collection of 25 arcade titles, called *Amusement Arcade Toaplan*, is in the works for various mobile devices. That's a lot of Toaplan!

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

I should CoCo

Stop the search and call off the dogs. There's no need to be sweeping through bracken whilst carrying torches. I've found it. I have found the most niche gaming podcast out there. A couple of gentlemen in America take the crown for what must be a gaming podcast dedicated to the smallest audience. And I include myself in that demographic.

The CoCo Show is hosted by Boat and Aaron and is a deep dive into the world of the TRS-80 Color Computer or the CoCo as it is affectionately known. I stumbled across this because I was looking for a podcast about retro games and I found *Our Sinclair*, another show they do. It sounded pretty cool hearing American accents talking about what is essentially a British phenomenon. Looking at the details for the show I saw these guys were part of a collective called Amigos Retro Gaming, a group originally dedicated to the Amiga.

Then I saw they did a show about the CoCo. I've mentioned before about my history with the Dragon 32. It was the first computer I ever had and I had been looking at them on eBay since I saw one in a junk shop a couple of months ago. Next month I'll tell you whether I ended up buying one or not (spoiler, I did). The CoCo and Dragon are pretty similar, potentially even clones, and I had to check this pod out.

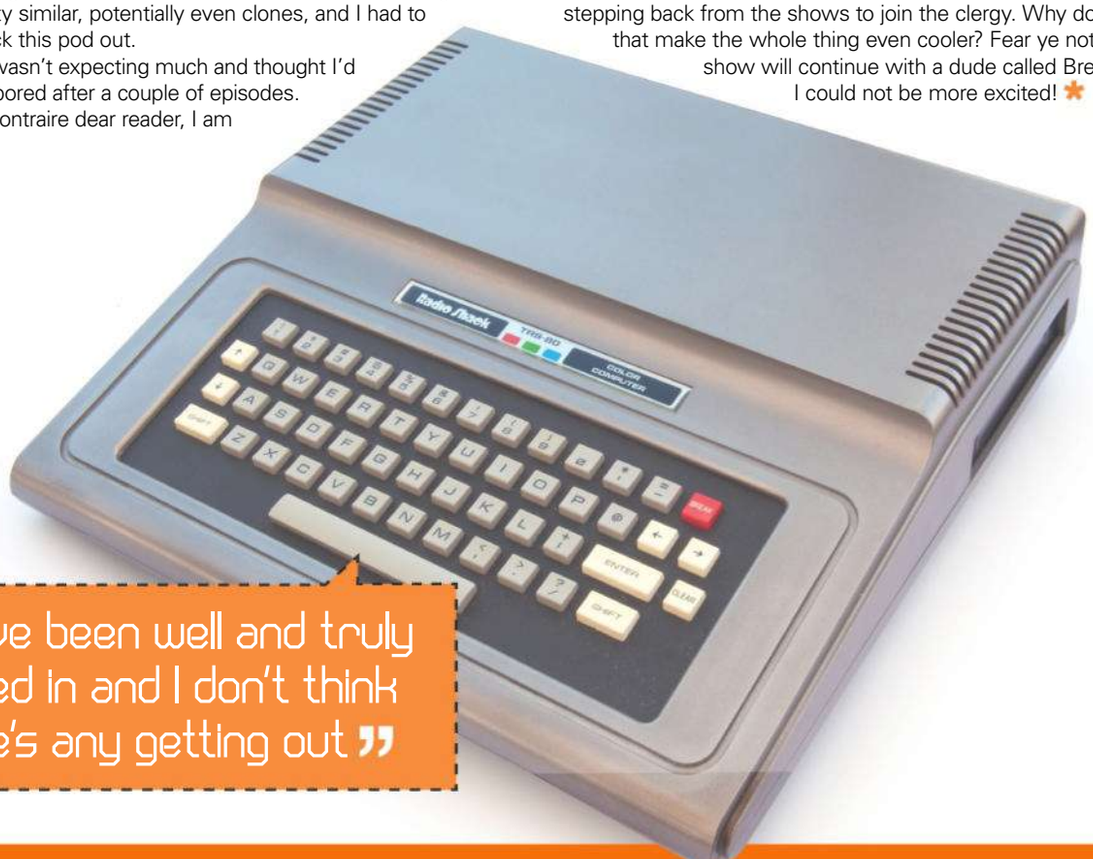
I wasn't expecting much and thought I'd get bored after a couple of episodes. Au contraire dear reader, I am OBSESSED with the bloomin' show. I caned all 40-odd episodes in two weeks. I signed up to their Patreon. I contribute to their Discord. I have been well and truly sucked in and I don't think there's any getting out.

Who would have thought that two guys rambling on about *Donkey King* or *Sailor Man* on a long-forgotten machine that never even made it to the UK would be so mesmerising? I think part of the deal is in a world of podcasts where people ramble on for way too long, sharing private jokes with their friends and generally being tedious, hearing a tight 35-minute show that stays on topic is refreshing. They also clearly love the subject. The passion is tangible.

I've finished all the current ones and they only release a new one each month so I have started the *Our Sinclair* show. Not a machine I have much of a history with and yet they still completely grab my attention and make me want to listen more. Oh yeah, check out how they pronounce *Atic Atac*!

I highly recommend checking these chaps out. Sure, when they attempt British accents I want to send them to the Tower, but that aside it's a great listen. All we need now are podcasts for the Beeb (if someone is willing to pay me, I'll do it) and the Tatung Einstein.

PS: Literally as I was about to hit send I heard that Boat is stepping back from the shows to join the clergy. Why does that make the whole thing even cooler? Fear ye not, the show will continue with a dude called Brent… I could not be more excited! *



> "I have been well and truly sucked in and I don't think there's any getting out"

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

First steps

I'm not sure if I've mentioned it in this column yet, but I became a grandfather last year. Yes: I'm that old. He's brilliant, and one of the greatest gifts I've ever been given in my life. The fact it came in the same year that I lost my dad felt like the universe's way of rebalancing. Circle of life and all that.

A couple of weeks back, we were babysitting my grandson for the weekend, and decided to take him to the seaside. They live about half an hour from Cleethorpes – a place that is a bit of a time capsule of a Britain long since lost, and exactly the kind of town that I spent many a summer holiday in.

It's probably fair to say that those summer holidays are where my love of games began. Way before I ever had a console or computer at home, the flashing lights and throbbing drone of *Space Invaders* lured me in like a moth to a flame. I can remember being small enough that I couldn't even reach the *Battlezone* periscope viewfinder.

On those formative family holidays we would typically be accompanied by my grandparents. I was particularly close to my mum's dad, and it was usually he that would take me into the arcades. I've such memories of playing on those weird lightgun shooting galleries with him – the ones that were always Wild West-themed, and required you to shoot at, say, a frying pan or an owl in order to open an outhouse door – and especially the penny falls.

You know the penny falls, right? Those machines where you roll 2p coins down a ramp to dislodge more change (and, if you're lucky, a novelty pencil topper). It might be sentimental, but it was on my grandad bucket list to play the penny falls with my own grandson. In Cleethorpes I ticked that one off. I mean, he didn't really have a sense of what he was doing, but he's old enough that – with a bit of help – he could get the coins in the slot. Job done. Just don't mention the *Thomas The Tank Engine* ride I sat him in (he was fine until it started moving, and then completely freaked out).

Sadly, his parents aren't gamers. They both seem somehow more grown up than I am; she's a teacher and he's a police officer. My daughter has only ever really played *The Sims*, while his dad pretty much lives for football. The only videogame I've ever seen in their house is that year's edition of *FIFA*.

> "The only videogame I've ever seen in their house is that year's edition of FIFA"

There's hope that he isn't growing up in an entirely games-free environment; my daughter also let me know that he was recently gripped by his cousins playing on their Nintendo Switch.

When the time is right, I sort of see it as my grandfatherly role to properly introduce my grandson to videogames, and that brief arcade visit was the first step on the road. The question is where to go next?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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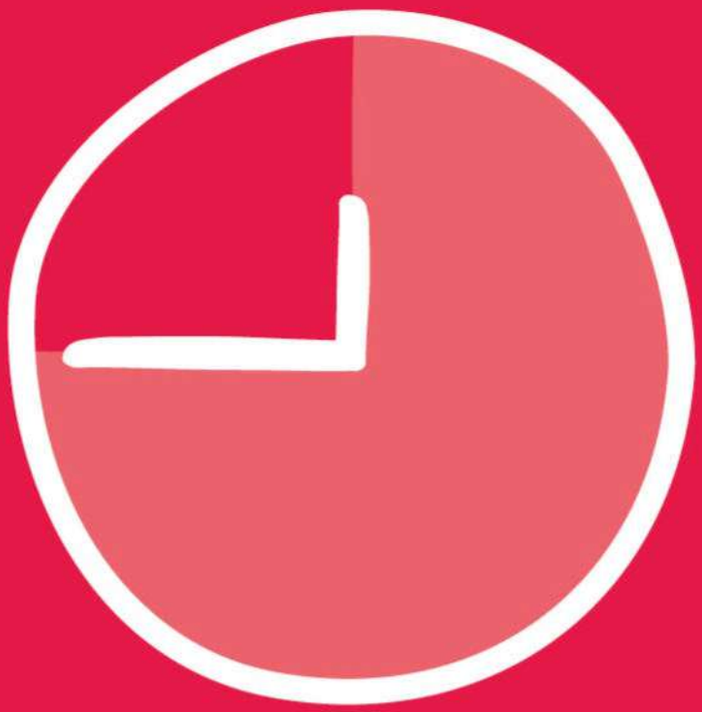

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» Sarah Roberts uses an iPad to work out the basic layout and design of her artworks.

» Sarah found the creation of a *Phantasy Star II* title screen rather challenging due to its sheer size.

Sarah Roberts Art

Meet the artist who makes stunning real-life pixel art with tiny plastic beads

> "I like creating title screens of retro games because it tells the story of the whole game"
>
> **SARAH ROBERTS**

Sarah Roberts is an artist living in Surrey. She makes pixel art mainly out of Perler beads and cross-stitch which she makes available to buy. Readers can follow her on Instagram @pixel_artist and go to etsy.com/shop/pixelartist1 to make purchases. We recently caught up with Sarah to hear more about her inspiration and the process behind her distinctive art.

Your artwork is amazing. Do you have an artistic background?
I have always been interested in arts and crafts since I was young. After I left school, I was lucky enough to find work in that industry, working for several prop companies and a well-established jewellery company (doing stoning, enamelling and quality checks). I learned and developed the beautiful finer detail which enhances the beauty of a finished piece of work.

What inspired you to create artworks based on popular videogame characters?
After my nephew and niece were born, I wanted to become the cool auntie. I once again started looking back into my old childhood videogames that my brother and I used to play on the Mega Drive and Game Boy after school, such as *Streets Of Rage*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Double Dragon*, *Duck Tales* and so on. I wanted to see if I could make some artwork for their rooms and as my nephew grew older he became a gaming YouTuber (THE SGB) so I had to keep up with him on what is hot in the gaming world and what is not.

Many are produced using Perler beads. Why do you use them?
My work is produced mainly by cross-stitch, where I can use a variety of colours to give a more detailed result when making smaller items. For example, earrings, keyrings and magnets. For larger pictures I tend to use Perler beads which, along with Artkal and Hama, are types of fused small plastic beads which you can arrange on pegboards in a design of your choice, and either iron or use a heat press and wax paper to fuse them together. This creates a solid piece of art that can then be framed or made into a wall hanging. I mainly use Perler and Hama beads in my work because

» The artworks, made using Perler beads, are good enough to frame.

» This is a striking recreation of *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master.*

» *Streets Of Rage* is often requested by fans of the side-scrolling beat-'em-up.

» How many of the following power-ups and characters do you recognise?

» Sarah admits making a lot of mistakes at the start but she's definitely perfected her craft.

» Sarah creates numerous classic characters, including Sailor Mars and Sailor Venus from the *Sailor Moon* series.

they have a large selection of colours with different tonal ranges for me to create a final piece of artwork that I would be happy with. They are perfect for retro-gaming art because retro games are made from pixels! So I just use a Perler or Hama bead to represent each pixel of a videogame. My larger pieces are made up of about 3,558 beads which give a detailed representation of the game I'm trying to recreate in my artwork.

So how exactly do you make your impressive creations?

Perler beads and cross-stitch have similar processes at the start. I think of a videogame image, then turn it into a pixel form and work out the colour reference I should use for the given size artwork I would be doing. For the Perler beads I would create the design on boards using the beads and, once finished, tape it down and flip it over (hoping it wouldn't mess up) before ironing, still hoping it wouldn't burn. I have my fingers crossed a lot during the last couple of processes.

How long does it take to produce an artwork and when do you know you've perfected the look?

I like creating title screens of retro games because it tells the story of the whole game rather than just a screenshot, because this only tells a section of a videogame. The time it takes depends on the size of work and whether it's a cross-stitch or Perler, so it ranges from a day to four weeks, for example, for an A4 cross-stitch picture. I never know if I have perfected the look, because I am always trying to improve on each piece of work I make. My fans and followers give me great encouragement to improve and challenge myself with pieces they have requested. Sometimes I recreate replicas of the smaller pieces.

What has been your most difficult artwork?

One of my two most challenging pieces was a Perler *Phantasy Star II* picture which was requested by two loyal fans (I hate to say, but I'd never heard of it). I thought I would try and make it and it ended up being one of the largest pieces I have ever made. I also created a cross-stitch *Streets Of Rage* picture and that was challenging because of the sheer number of different colours and tones it took to recreate the title screen in order to give it a wow factor.

What reaction do you get and do many people put in requests?

I'm happy to say I get a lot of positive comments and lots of wows when people see my work. I get lots of requests which keep me busy and it makes me want to expand on things I do. My most popular artworks are for *Sonic, Mario, Zelda, Street Fighter* and *Streets Of Rage*.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MARCH 2007 – The next-gen battle finally commences in earnest as the PS3 hits our shores, there's a Crackdown on crime and it seems you may have a Snake in your pocket. Nick Thorpe does the time warp again, and returns with tales of yesterday's gaming events

» The £425 price tag of Sony's new machine didn't stop players picking it up in droves.

NEWS MARCH 2007

On 1 March, the Swiss army accidentally invaded neighbouring Liechtenstein. A company of 171 Swiss soldiers made the unintentional two kilometre incursion during a training exercise near an unmarked section of the border, with bad weather causing the commander to lead his men in the wrong direction. Liechtenstein's representatives claimed that they only became aware of the incident when told about it by the Swiss.

A scandal surrounding the use of premium-rate phone lines in TV and radio shows rumbled throughout March, as it emerged that shows had faked competition winners and audiences had been invited to call into competitions that had closed. The most high-profile casualty was the dedicated phone-in quiz channel ITV Play, initially suspended on 5 March before being closed permanently on 13 March.

Fifteen Royal Navy personnel were detained by Iranian authorities on 23 March, while searching a merchant vessel. The British crew of the HMS Cornwall claimed to have been in Iraqi waters, while Iranian authorities insisted that they had been captured in Iranian territory. The sailors were released on 4 April, in an act that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described as a "gift" to the UK.

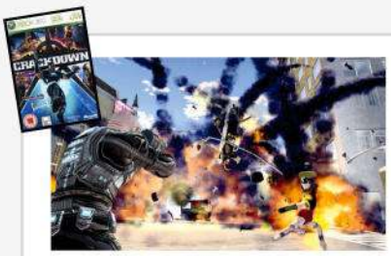
THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 2007

UK gamers finally got their chance to pick up the PlayStation 3 on 23 March, and Sony certainly pushed the boat out. The flagship Oxford Street branch of Virgin Megastores allowed players to camp out in advance of the midnight launch, and those in attendance were richly rewarded when Sony boss Phil Harrison announced that every customer would also be taking home a 46-inch HD television. One week later, Chart Track confirmed that almost 165,000 of the machines had been sold in just two days, making it the UK's fastest-selling home console ever – though not the fastest-selling console overall, as sales fell just short of the 185,000 consoles sold during the PSP's launch weekend a year and a half earlier. *Resistance: Fall Of Man* was the most popular launch game, followed by *MotorStorm*.

Despite the excitement over the new console's launch, most of the early software was already covered in import form over the prior months. That left import reviews of UK launch game *Virtua Fighter 5* for this month. *Play*'s bizarre review claimed "we don't really like it that much" and "we're no good at it", and even went so far as to admit that, "We just haven't got the time, and more crucially skill, to be able to judge with absolute assurance how the balance has been affected." The game was still given 83%, but with the warning, "If you're considering a purchase with little knowledge of the series, just don't." Sega's scrapping sequel was "still the pinnacle of 3D videogame fighting" according to *games™*, but the 8/10 review lamented the lack of online fighting.

Over on the Xbox 360, the clear game of the month was *Crackdown*, as the super-powered open-world crime-fighting game scored 8/10 in *Edge*, *games™* and *X360*, and 4/5 in *360*. *X360* claimed that, "Whether you're piling up cars for chain explosions, climbing up to the tops of skyscrapers, seeing how far you can toss bodies into the ocean or (just occasionally) chasing down bad guys, the fun flows consistently from start to finish." Similarly, *games™* felt that, "Real Time Worlds has tapped into a fundamental quality at the heart of so many good videogames: wish fulfilment."

» [PS3] Hey look, it's the Jazz Bar MJQ. Who doesn't love a reference to *Shenmue*?



» [Xbox 360] *Crackdown*'s open-world gameplay was light on story and heavy on creative carnage.

» [PSP] The cancellation of *Total Overdose 2: Tequila Gunrise* meant the series ended here.

Edge felt that the game was "daringly lean" and "what you put in is what you get out".

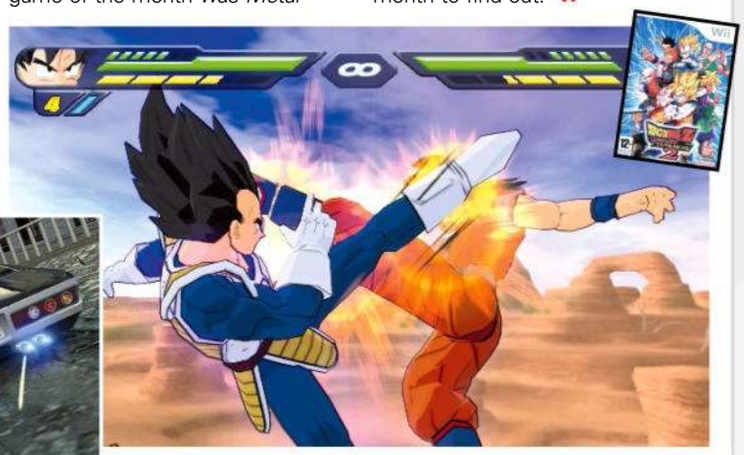
The quality of games on Nintendo's platforms was subject to debate. *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2* earned 84% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which felt that it offered, "Loads to do, tons of moves, great action and numerous characters," while *games™* gave it 3/10 and said that it "lacks balance and plays with no subtlety". *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* for the DS earned 90% from *ONM*, which felt that the game was "unquestionably the best football game on the DS by a long shot". By contrast, *games™* felt that "the gameplay lacks the subtlety and skill traditionally associated with the franchise" and was "never more than a weak imitator" worth 4/10.

Over on the PS2, *Burnout Dominator* earned 8/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* – though it offered "little deviation from the familiar route," it was "still compulsive driving action". PSP owners had a decent month, in part due to *Chili Con Carnage*, a remixed conversion of *Total Overdose* that earned 8/10 from both *Official PS2* and *Official PlayStation Magazine*. The latter felt that it "keeps all the good bits of its predecessor" and was a "stupid, loud relentless mix of guns and chuckles". Dissenting, *games™* gave it 5/10 and said it was "fun but shallow". A conversion of *The Warriors* also earned 8/10 in *Official PS2*.

However, the most exciting PSP game of the month was *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*. *Play* gave it 90%, saying that, "Once you get the hang of the radar and the recruitment, *Portable Ops* falls into a nice rhythm, swinging between your need to accomplish your main mission and your want to recruit, recruit, recruit." *Official PS2* noted that "it doesn't feel like previous *MGS* games" and questioned the lack of "epic setpieces" concluding that while it was "a lot of fun in places" players "expecting the action and pace of the previous PlayStation games will be sorely disappointed", ultimately awarding it 7/10.

Can the PS3 build on its early momentum? Come back next month to find out. ✱

» [PS2] *Burnout Dominator* crashed into magazines and received generally good review scores.



» [Wii] If *DBZ* excites you, you probably disagreed with that *games™* review.

CHARTS

MARCH 2007

XBOX 360

1 – **Lost Planet** (Capcom)
2 – **Gears Of War** (Microsoft)
3 – **Rainbow Six Vegas** (Ubisoft)
4 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 6** (Konami)
5 – **Call Of Duty 3** (Activision)

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 6** (Konami)
2 – **Need For Speed: Carbon** (EA)
3 – **Scarface: The World Is Yours** (Vivendi)
4 – **Lego Star Wars II** (Eidos)
5 – **FIFA 07** (EA)

PC

1 – **World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade** (Vivendi)
2 – **Football Manager 2007** (Sega)
3 – **FIFA 07** (EA)
4 – **The Sims 2: Pets** (EA)
5 – **Medieval II: Total War** (Sega)

MUSIC

1 – **Walk This Way** (Sugababes vs Girls Aloud)
2 – **The Sweet Escape** (Gwen Stefani ft Akon)
3 – **(I'm Gonna Be) 500 Miles** (The Proclaimers/Brian Potter/Andy Pipkin)
4 – **Shine** (Take That)
5 – **How To Save A Life** (The Fray)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official PlayStation Magazine

"Sony isn't making any money on PS3. In fact it's making a massive loss on every unit sold," says *OPM*. With a retail price of $599 and a manufacturing cost of $840.35, that's a whopping $241.35 per console.

games™

"I would like to express my disgust that the European Wii's Virtual Console is not optimised to run at 60Hz," says reader James Rushton. The magazine advises buying an American console – the classic solution.

PC Gamer

Guns are boring, says Jim Rossignol. "We will have reached the next level of action gaming when Lara Croft rides a dimension-skipping battering ram and Duke Nukem is actually a nuclear bomb with arms and legs."

Enduro

GRUELLING, BUT SATISFYING

RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI 2600 » 1983 » ACTIVISION

Ever since the Atari 2600+ has been announced I've been checking out the prices of games I used to love playing on the original console. While the Evercade already satiates my need for playing 2600 games thanks to a couple of cartridge packs, I find myself yearning for the system's many Activision games.

One I keep returning to is Larry Miller's *Enduro*, a truly impressive racing game that you can typically pick up for around the £20 mark in good condition. Like a lot of Activision's 2600 releases it's not only technically accomplished but also has lots of interesting gameplay mechanics. Unlike other racing games of the time *Enduro* is more of an endurance test as you're required to pass a certain number of cars in order to continue racing.

In *Enduro* you've only got a single day of driving to pass the required quota of cars, and as you can imagine, things get a lot trickier the longer you play. Aside from its gruelling structure and fast pace, what sets *Enduro* apart from similar racers is its numerous little touches. Day turns to night and cars become virtually invisible with only their lights showing, fog patches can roll in, obscuring a large part of the screen and there are plenty more hazards to contend with as play continues.

As a result it really feels like you're taking part in a gruelling cross-country event and after a while you'll almost feel relieved that you failed to pass the required number of vehicles. And yet you'll immediately return for another game, because there's something strangely compelling about *Enduro*'s structure.

When *Activision Hits Remixed* came out on the PSP I'd regularly play *Enduro* with friends and we'd have lengthy competitions to see how far each of us could get, with the record eventually standing at seven days. In the good old days that achievement was enough to earn one of Activision's coveted badges, nowadays you're lucky to get a "well done" from your peers.

I've still got the PSP version and I'm now weighing up whether it's worth buying the US version of *Activision Anthology* on PS2 or to simply preorder an Atari 2600+ and grab a copy of the original game. Knowing me, I'll probably do both.

THE MAGIC OF MARIO

FROM HIS INTRODUCTION AS JUMPMAN IN DONKEY KONG TO THE RECENTLY RELEASED SUPER MARIO WONDER, NINTENDO'S ICONIC SUPERSTAR HAS BEEN DELIGHTING GAMERS FOR GENERATIONS. VETERANS FROM ACROSS THE INDUSTRY REVEAL WHY MARIO HAS LOST NONE OF HIS APPEAL

WORDS BY NICK THORPE, RORY MILNE AND DARRAN JONES

There's a reason why Mario has graced the cover of Retro Gamer multiple times. He's become one of gaming's cornerstones, a character that's every bit as synonymous with videogames as Pac-Man, Lara Croft or those pesky little aliens from *Space Invaders*. There's a good chance that even your dear old nan will recognise Mario – that's how much of an important cultural icon he's become.

Originally making his debut in single-screen platformers like *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros*, in 1985 he starred in his first side-scrolling adventure, *Super Mario Bros*, and the moustachioed hero hasn't looked back since. For many gamers and developers, the *Super Mario Bros* series is considered a template for how to create the perfect platformer. Many have attempted to emulate Mario's success over the years and very few have succeeded – fewer still have actually bested him. Aside from the recent success of Crash Bandicoot and Spyro, only Sonic could be considered as Mario's biggest competitor today and even with all his popularity, he's rarely had the critical acclaim in his 3D adventures like Mario has had. Even an average *Mario* game can feel special when placed against the competition, and it's telling that of all the platform heroes of the Eighties and Nineties, only Sonic has endured for as long as Nintendo's lovable plumber.

From his 2D adventures of the mid-Eighties and early Nineties, to his innovative modern 3D outings of today – Mario's games have always managed to impress and it's a rare *Mario* adventure that isn't critically acclaimed by reviewers. *Super Mario 64* for example, not only redefined platforming in a 3D space, but also set new standards for 3D games in general – particularly when it came to how characters should control in this exciting new environment.

In more recent years the adventures of Nintendo's evergreen star have veered off in two distinct directions: the *New Super Mario Bros* series, which debuted on the DS in 2006, is where you'll find his side-on escapades, while his 3D adventures are largely where all the series' new innovations can be found.

But what makes Mario's games so special and why have they constantly been considered the pinnacle of their genre for so many years now? We'll be answering those questions over the following ten pages by breaking down the many core aspects of Mario, from how his games control, to how they're designed, with input from a variety of industry veterans. We'll also be highlighting the sheer versatility of Mario and examining some of the many spin-offs he's appeared in, from the *Super Mario Kart* franchise, to RPG offerings like the *Paper Mario* series. Even if you're not the biggest fan of Mario, it's hard to deny the colossal impact he's had on videogame culture and the platforming genre and his recent billion dollar success at the box office would suggest that he's more popular than ever. So let's hear it for Mario, a true gaming superstar whose success has come along in leaps and bounds.

THE INTERVIEWEES

MATTHEW CASTLE
■ Former editor, *Official Nintendo Magazine*

DALEY JOHNSON
■ Game designer, Playtonic Games

SMOOTH MCGROOVE
■ YouTube creator, vocalist

PAUL MURPHY
■ Author, *Gamebook: The Unofficial DMG Companion*

PHILIP OLIVER
■ Game designer, cofounder of Blitz Games

CRAIG STITT
■ Artist, creator of *Spyro The Dragon*

CHRIS SUTHERLAND
■ Programmer, Playtonic Games, ex-Rare

CAPTIVATING CHARACTER

IF YOU'RE GOING TO CHOOSE A CHARACTER AS THE FACE OF YOUR COMPANY, YOU'D BETTER MAKE SURE HE IS APPEALING AS POSSIBLE. SHIGERU MIYAMOTO'S DESIGN HAS PROVEN TIMELESS, PROVIDING NINTENDO WITH A FACE THAT HAS SURVIVED DECADES IN THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Ask someone who Mario is, and there's a good chance they'll be able to tell you at least a little something about him. When the 35th anniversary of *Super Mario Bros* rolled around in 2020, the Q Scores Company noted that 72% of Americans over the age of six were familiar with Mario, and that he was the most popular videogame character. It's likely that this figure has only grown since then – after all, his 2023 movie grossed over $1.3 billion.

But Mario hasn't always been the star that he is today. Indeed, Mario's name didn't even appear in the title of his debut outing, though his name wasn't exactly a fixed matter when *Donkey Kong* arrived in arcades – the American operating manual for the game referred to him as Jumpman. In an Iwata Asks interview on *New Super Mario Bros*, Shigeru Miyamoto noted that he referred to Mario as "Mr Video," a character intended for use across a variety of games. "Someone at Nintendo Of America actually came up with the name Mario," he noted, and a promotional flyer does indeed call him Mario.

Speaking of *Donkey Kong*, Mario wasn't even a plumber to begin with – he was a carpenter in that game. In a 2012 interview, Shigeru Miyamoto told *Game Informer* that, "There's really only one rule in terms of the things that Mario does. Generally, it's that he's more on the blue-collar side." You can see that in his early roles, as he worked in factories in his Game & Watch years and did demolition work in *Wrecking Crew*, reflecting Miyamoto's desire to use him in a variety of settings. In fact, the only major exception to that blue-collar preference is *Dr Mario*. The 1983 arcade game *Mario Bros* established Mario and his brother Luigi as plumbers, and that was the characterisation that ultimately stuck.

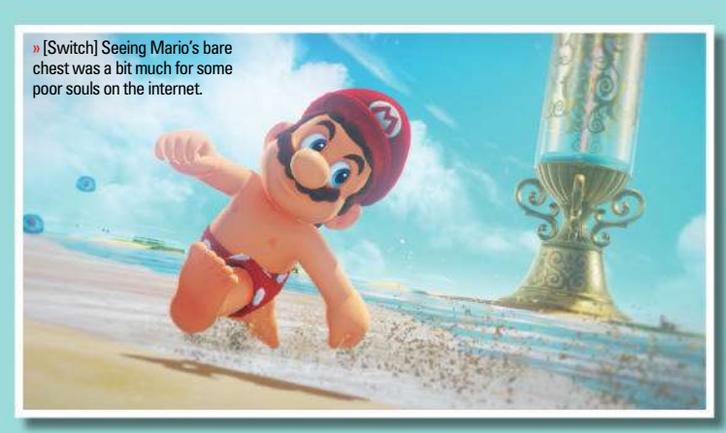
Though Mario's name and occupation weren't nailed down from the start, his look was almost complete from the very beginning. Take a peek at the cabinet artwork for *Donkey Kong* and though Mario's eyes were smaller and he looked a bit more riled up than he usually gets, he's in his iconic red hat and has a prominent moustache. He's wearing red dungarees and a blue shirt, and though the original *Mario Bros* artwork gives him a blue hat, blue dungarees and a red shirt, he swapped back to the *Donkey Kong* colour scheme for the first two *Super Mario Bros* games – it was *Super Mario Bros 3* that introduced the colour scheme he wears today.

It might seem crazy that the process of solidifying Mario's character and appearance took over five years to achieve, but the result is a design that has stood up to decades of scrutiny and the introduction of 3D artwork. The effort was more than worthwhile. "I think a big part of Mario's appeal is what he represents – the heart of Nintendo! When you see Mario, your brain goes 'fun!'" says Daley Johnson, a game designer at Playtonic and platform game enthusiast. "He's got that Mickey Mouse effect. That, 'Oh I know what to expect.' Mario guarantees a quality stamp because he's an icon." He's a constant – a character that never needs to reinvent himself, because he's timeless.

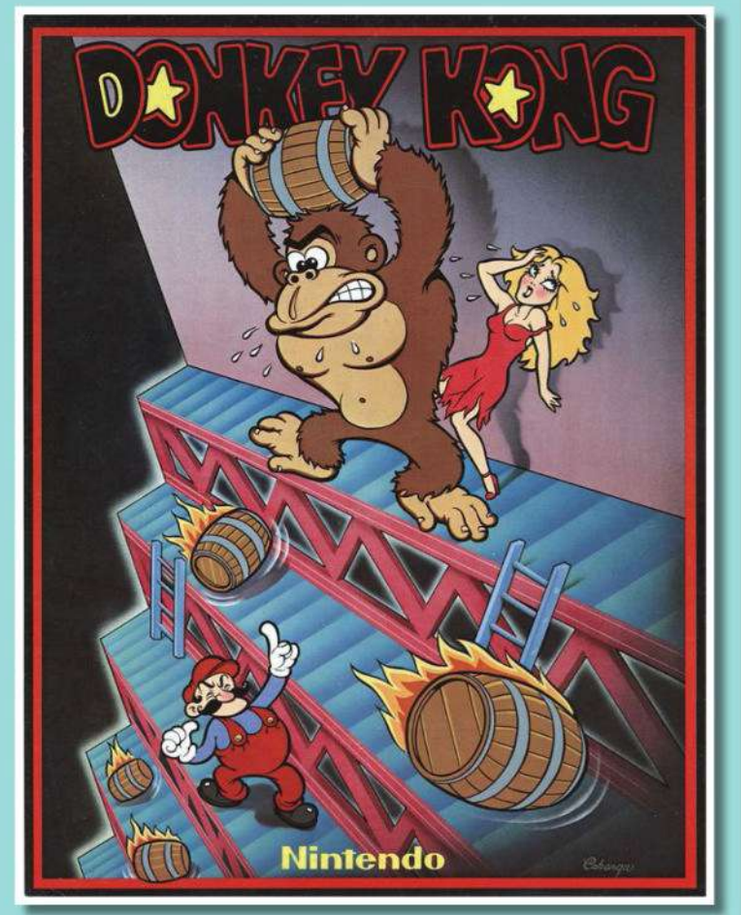
Playing with Mario's appearance can even pay dividends in gameplay terms – the first time Mario had his hat stolen in *Super Mario 64* was certainly memorable, as the sight of his hair was both unexpected and somewhat unsettling. *Super Mario Sunshine* allowed him to don some summer clothes if you were good enough to earn them, and *Super Mario Odyssey* even gave him beachwear to some level of online consternation. What were people expecting from a game that allowed Mario to take the form of everything from dinosaurs to Goombas, though? Indeed, it's the hat and moustache that keep him recognisable in those alternative forms that he adopts.

While it's not something that should be done too often, it's worth comparing Mario to Sonic here. Sonic's design has changed enough over the years that Sega went so far as to acknowledge the differences in *Sonic Generations*, with the shorter, mute version of the past meeting the streamlined version of the present. Nintendo has never felt the need to perform such a stunt – indeed, the furthest it has gone is updating Mario's colour scheme in older sprites in the *Super Mario Maker* games, in order to match his current appearance. Those games present the various looks of Mario not as a contrast to one another, but as part of one consistent identity that has persisted for decades. Given the strength of Mario's character design, we're sure it will last for decades to come too.

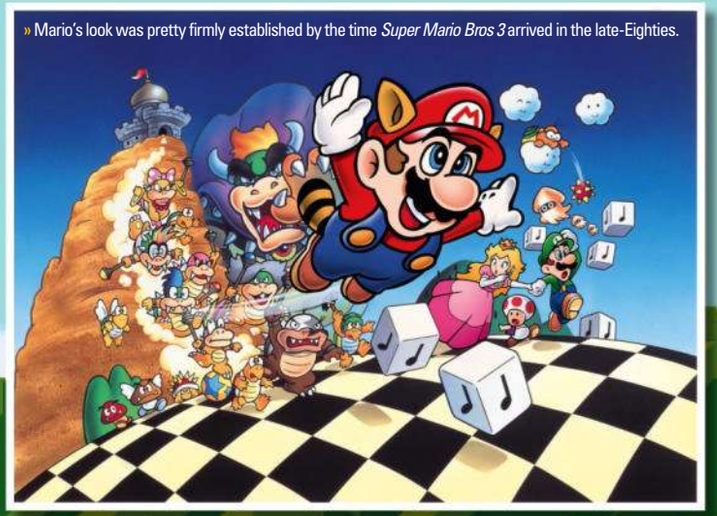
» Here's the man as he looks today – not much has changed in over 30 years.



» [Switch] Seeing Mario's bare chest was a bit much for some poor souls on the internet.



» Mario's earliest appearance in *Donkey Kong* is recognisably him, albeit with some unusual aspects.



» Mario's look was pretty firmly established by the time *Super Mario Bros 3* arrived in the late-Eighties.

Q&A CRAIG STITT

THIS ARTIST KNOWS ABOUT RUNNING UP AGAINST MARIO, HAVING WORKED ON SONIC 2 AND CREATED SPYRO

As an artist, what do you think gamers find appealing about Mario as a character?

I think for Mario it was the whole package. The simple, yet memorable worlds, the *great* music, and as the game progressed, Mario's voice and personality really came out.

I believe it's also that the game is, on one hand, very simple to play, but on the other hand, very difficult to master. This lets new and young players have fun, and keeps the dedicated players coming back.

Do you think his everyman persona has become an important part of his appeal over the years?

I would have to agree that his everyman persona is an important part of his longevity and popularity. You look back at games like *Earthworm Jim*, or *ToeJam & Earl*, and so many other awesome games, that all had great characters and great/innovative gameplay, but you couldn't really identify with the characters. I also think there is also a certain amount of 'genius dumb luck' that comes into play as to why some characters take off and others fall away.

You've worked on both 2D and 3D platformers. Did Mario's games or Mario as a character have any influence on games you were making like *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Spyro The Dragon*?

It would be hard to make a game and not have Mario have an influence on that game, be it 2D or 3D or VR. Mario is now cemented in our subconscious and is a part of that aspect of our brain that says, "This is fun, or this is not fun." Along with Mario, I also think Sonic and Spyro are part of that 'subconscious designer' in our heads.

Why do you think that characters like Mario and Spyro were able to flourish in 3D worlds, while popular 2D platform mascots like Earthworm Jim and Bubsy floundered?

I think one of the main reasons is that the gameplay and controls were very simple in those games. Little kids could play, as well as mums and dads. Yet the gameplay was also complex and hard enough to keep serious gamers engaged.

I used to answer the fan mail for Spyro and I got a *lot* of letters from parents saying how much their entire family enjoyed the game. They would then say that their son or daughter was stuck at a certain point and ask for hints. Then, many times, the parent would go on to say that *they* were stuck at a different spot and asked for help!

Sadly there are a lot of great games that didn't go as far as they could have, or should have, because the publisher messed up the marketing or simply didn't have any marketing.

DIVINE DESIGN

MARIO COULD HAVE ALL THE APPEAL AS A CHARACTER, BUT WITHOUT ENGAGING WORLDS TO EXPLORE HE WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A VIDEOGAME STAR. THANKFULLY, NINTENDO HAS ENSURED THAT IMAGINATIVE LEVEL DESIGN IS SOMETHING THAT THE PLUMBER HAS NEVER HAD TO DO WITHOUT

» [SNES] Ghost Houses in *Super Mario World* emphasise thinking over straightforward platforming action.

Above all else, the driving force behind Mario's success is exquisite game design – something that is acknowledged by players and game designers alike. "*Mario* games have a timeless charm and wide appeal whether it's 2D or 3D," says Philip Oliver, who along with his twin brother Andrew is a veteran developer with over 40 years in the business. "Objectives are obvious, rewarded en route and praised when completed. Enemies are interesting, individually not too tough, but get progressively more challenging based on abundance and locations. Even when you 'die', it feels fair. Not something that can be said of all games, especially back then!

"I first saw *Super Mario Bros* on the NES at CES Jan 1990 in Las Vegas, by which time it was already a monster hit," Philip remembers. "It was such a beautifully elegant design. The objective was clear: get to the end on the right, but enemies and obstacles, of increasing difficulty, will make that a challenge! With a simple console control pad and its limited buttons, there was no learning time involved and there was nothing intimidating about it at all." Inspired by this, Philip and Andrew began to write NES games, citing *Dreamworld Pogie* as one that is a particular homage to *Super Mario Bros*. The lack of learning time Philip mentioned is one of the most famous aspects of *Super Mario Bros*, in fact. On the very first screen, the game introduces you to all of the fundamentals – enemies, regular blocks, Question Blocks and mushrooms.

> "KEEP THE CONTROLS SIMPLE AND THE OBJECTIVES OBVIOUS, WHILST NOT APPEARING TO BE TOO SIMPLE OR CONDESCENDING"
> PHILIP OLIVER

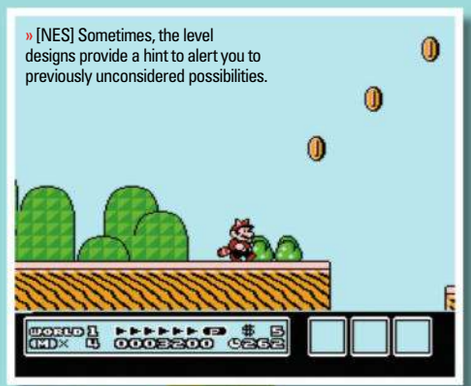
Even in the original *Super Mario Bros*, that left plenty to discover. There are varied environments with their own unique challenges, confrontations with Bowser and so many secrets to find – underground areas in pipes, beanstalks leading to the sky, Warp Zones beyond the usual end of the stage and more. Ingenious little touches like platforms connected by pulleys were the start of fantastic gimmicks employed by later games, including floating rafts and platforms that moved along rails. Likewise, enemy behaviours became more interesting, most notably with the Boos which wouldn't move if Mario looked at them.

Moving to 3D posed twin challenges for platform game designers. "Keep the controls simple and the objectives obvious, whilst not appearing to be too simple or condescending," says Philip. "In the early Nineties, game designers, particularly Andrew and I, debated how character platform games, our speciality, could achieve both these when translated into 3D," he recalls. *Super Mario 64* was a "watershed moment" according to Philip, who feels that 3D *Mario* games avoided unnecessary complexity and "only take the advantages of that third dimension and the gameplay and visual opportunities it presents".

In shifting to 3D, Nintendo could have chosen to retain the linear obstacle courses of the 2D games – indeed, games like *Crash Bandicoot* had plenty of success doing just that. However, Nintendo reimagined the *Mario* formula and introduced open 3D spaces with a variety of routes and goals. "One of the breakthroughs they made was the way they handled the viewpoint camera in the 3D space," Philip explains. "It had its own logic to ensure the player got a great view of both Mario and the challenges ahead, but not simply by being locked behind him at a set distance and angle. This made it visually so much more attractive and easier to play."

One particularly strong aspect of the *Mario* games is that you never need to do absolutely everything, which serves a dual purpose. It serves as a way of circumventing frustration, by allowing players to simply avoid challenges

» [NES] Most Mario platformers are quick to reward a player's natural curiosity.



» [NES] Sometimes, the level designs provide a hint to alert you to previously unconsidered possibilities.

» [Nintendo 64] In 3D, Mario can just run around enemies, causing Nintendo to reconsider its stage designs.

» [Wii] Some innovations in 3D *Mario* games have come from unusual environments, as in the *Galaxy* games.

» [3DS] Careful stage design was required to translate the 2D obstacle course philosophy to 3D spaces.

» [Switch] Giving regular players design tools in *Super Mario Maker* does much to prove Nintendo's expertise.

that they struggle with, and it ensures that there's usually plenty of life left in the game after Bowser is finally toppled – completists will rejoice in finding all the exits in *Super Mario World*, or as many as 50 additional stars in *Super Mario 64*. In a series that appeals to such a broad range of players, that level of optional depth is essential.

Of course, Nintendo did eventually try more traditional obstacle course designs in *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Super Mario 3D World*. But no matter whether designing in 2D or 3D, Philip feels that the principles that underpin a good *Mario* level are universal. The first is to feature "[an] obvious objective, obvious route, obvious enemies and obstacles". The second is to ensure that "difficulty and duration of the level are directly proportional to how far you are into the game". The third is to engage the player with "micro rewards often (coins), occasional mini rewards for completing a section, and finish with a grand finale and big reward". Just imagine sliding down that flagpole and fireworks erupting before you turn the page, and you'll see exactly what he means.

» [Switch] Though many *Mario* stages are fairly abstract, New Donk City puts him in an urban setting.

Q&A MATTHEW CASTLE

THE FORMER OFFICIAL NINTENDO MAGAZINE WRITER EXPLAINS WHAT MAKES MARIO'S STAGES SO ENGAGING

What makes the level design in *Mario* games so strong?

It helps that they're built with the best building blocks around. Not just Mario himself, always a joy to control, but the enemies, toys and gimmicks that pepper levels from *Super Mario Bros* onwards. Crucially, the designers understand the importance of a hook – giving every stage a unique challenge, a new enemy type, a visual surprise or a setpiece that combines all of the above.

And then sprinkled over the top you have the meta strangeness – the secrets aimed at the fans who really drill into these things. That Nintendo were already doing this in *Super Mario Bros* seems so wild to me – the idea of leaping out of the level to run along the top, and to be rewarded for it, is such an out there idea. But here it is, smashing apart conventions that the game had only just introduced.

Where games like *Crash Bandicoot* tried to adapt the linear assault courses of 2D games into 3D, *Super Mario 64* adopted levels with multiple goals and fewer set routes. How important do you think that change was?

It seems inevitable to me that giving Mario 3D movement would require levels that pull him in every direction – you'd be squandering that technological evolution otherwise. Weirdly though, it does seem to trigger a tug-of-war between more traditional linear platforming and explorable land masses – one that's ongoing to this day. Even within *Mario 64* you start with the wide-open plains of Bob-omb Battlefield and slowly work your way towards more abstract spaces like Rainbow Ride.

As much as *64*'s worlds wowed me originally, I think Nintendo did something more interesting with 3D Mario when they started to prune back levels and focus on the moment-to-moment leaps and bounds. I don't want to reduce it to a crude 'jumps per minute' count, but *Galaxy* and *3D Land/World* feel more like platformers from the amount of time you spend worrying about what's under your feet at any given moment.

Where *Sunshine* and *Odyssey* changed Mario's 3D platforming tools, the *Galaxy* games focussed more on a different kind of environment. How do you think these approaches compare?

There was a time I would have said 'keep Mario pure' – transformations are one thing, but permanently altering his moves with a jetpack dependency felt like it was undermining one of the most purely enjoyable movesets in the platforming biz. *Galaxy*, which only really adds a spin jump to his repertoire, felt like a beautiful advert for what 3D *Mario* should be. The levels actively made Mario's moves more interesting which is a distinctly Nintendo bit of wizardry.

But again, *Odyssey* showed us a third way. The problem with *Sunshine* isn't the concept of a platforming tool, but the specific vagueness of FLUDD – Cappy feels more reliable and lets you do some unbelievable things as a result. The genius bit of *Odyssey* (or one of many) was including the Time Trial Ghosts so you could see what faster players were doing with that magic hat to chuck Mario round those levels at speed.

MARVELLOUS MECHANICS

FROM HIS DONKEY KONG COIN-OP DEBUT TO THE LONG-RUNNING SUPER MARIO SERIES, MARIO HAS BEEN DEFINED BY HIS RESPONSIVE CONTROLS AND ECLECTIC ABILITIES. CHRIS SUTHERLAND HELPS TO EXPLAIN WHY MARIO'S MECHANICS ARE SUBLIME

It's hard to believe now, but Mario's jump was a platforming first when he and it were introduced in 1981's *Donkey Kong* coin-op, and his barrel-smashing hammer attack was equally novel. In his first solo title – *Mario Bros* – he could skid to a halt mid-run, and he swapped his hammer for heading the underside of platforms to flip foes before kicking them off the screen.

The mechanics in Mario's next outing were simpler, in that he used his jump in *Super Mario Bros* for the NES to deter foes as well as for platforming, which former Rare coder Chris Sutherland describes as an evolution. "In *Donkey Kong*, Mario would jump in an arc, but you had more control in *Super Mario Bros*. There was also risk/reward, because you had to get close enough to the enemies to jump on them, but if you mistimed it you might get hit. You had control over the height of the jump too, depending on how long you pressed the button. Then with Koopas, jumping on them knocked them to one side instead of destroying them. So the same move had various different outcomes."

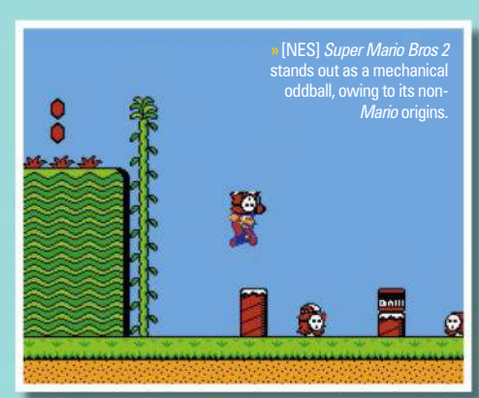
Two games called *Super Mario Bros 2* followed, a harder *Super Mario Bros* and a *Mario* re-skin of an unrelated Nintendo title. Arguably, *Super Mario Bros* true sequel was *Super Mario Bros 3*, which gave Mario raccoon and hammer-based power suits. "I guess the suits were there to emphasise the moves the developers gave Mario, and they also provided entertainment value!" Chris beams. "But they could have easily transformed him into other forms, like in *Super Mario Bros Wonder* where he transforms into an elephant. The other alternative would have been to just give him the moves, but that would have been less cute and entertaining. Even then, something visual would still have been needed to let players know that he had them."

Subsequently, Mario swapped his NES fireball attack for bouncing balls at foes in the Game Boy launch title *Super Mario Land*. Despite the system's small, blurry monochrome screen, Mario was as responsive to control as ever, as Chris explains. "The simple backgrounds didn't become blurry when they scrolled, so you could easily see Mario jumping in front of them. Then, as long as the game had the analog-ness of the jump and the enemies that came along, it was all going to work. Those probably had to be a bit slower because of the size and clarity of the screen, but you still got the experience that you got on the NES, only it fitted in your pocket."

» [Nintendo 64] Expanding into 3D space gave Mario the need for plenty of new movement options.

The following year Mario helped launch the SNES with *Super Mario World*, where he could fly, glide and spin attack enemies by donning a cape. He could also float around by inflating into balloon form, spit fireballs in all directions once suitably powered-up and break rotating blocks when riding his new dinosaur pal Yoshi.

Then in the Game Boy sequel *Super Mario Land 2*, Mario got a bunny suit with related moves, and four years later *Super Mario 64* appeared. The N64 title was the first opportunity to control Mario in 3D, and it was nothing short of joyful, as Chris recalls. "The developers wanted to give you the ability to freely move around and explore, run in circles, jump and backflip, and do all the new moves.



» [NES] *Super Mario Bros 2* stands out as a mechanical oddball, owing to its non-*Mario* origins.

» [NES] The introduction of sloped surfaces gave Mario this sliding attack.

"THE DEVELOPERS WANTED TO GIVE YOU THE ABILITY TO FREELY MOVE AROUND AND EXPLORE, RUN IN CIRCLES, JUMP AND BACKFLIP, AND DO ALL THE NEW MOVES"
CHRIS SUTHERLAND

» [GameCube] Sometimes, Nintendo seeks to change up the 3D *Mario* formula by tweaking his moves.

It was an experience that nobody had ever had before, and because it was so enjoyable I don't think anybody minded that they hadn't replicated the 2D *Super Mario* games. Also, jumping on things in 3D could be frustrating, because judging depth is quite tricky, so they gave Mario attacks like punches instead."

The next *Super Mario* release *Super Mario Sunshine* saw its star equipped with a water-powered backpack. Using this device, Mario could clean-up sludge, and by attaching different nozzles he could hover, fire water at enemies and use its jet of water to propel himself at top speed.

A different approach was taken with *Super Mario Galaxy* for the Wii, where the console's nunchuk was used to guide Mario around spherical worlds. When shaken, it spun Mario into melee attacks that were equally good at shattering objects. He could also briefly become a super-fast, invincible rainbow-hued version of himself.

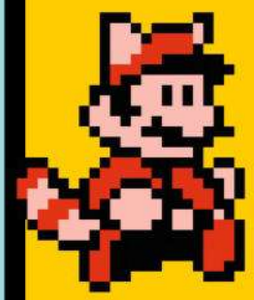
Later, the NES *Super Mario* games were channelled by the 2.5D titles *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Super Mario 3D World*. But Mario returned to three dimensions with *Super Mario Odyssey*, where he repurposed his cap to possess foes and use their abilities to solve puzzles and overcome obstacles.

Most recently, as if Mario hasn't been versatile enough over the years, 2023's *Super Mario Bros Wonder* promises to up the ante. His moves include capturing opponents in bubbles, and Mario's standard abilities can be altered by a Wonder Flower. Little wonder then, that playing as Mario remains such a pleasure.

» [Wii U] Occasionally, whole level designs are based around a particular power-up's capabilities.

MARIO'S SUPER FORMS

THE ECLECTIC COSTUMES WORN BY THE POPULAR PLUMBER



RACCOON MARIO

■ Sticking ears and a tail on Mario may seem gimmicky, but his Raccoon Suit comes in handy. Running and then wagging the tail allows Mario to fly short distances, and he can tail-whip enemies too.

TANOOKI MARIO

■ A tanooki is a Japanese raccoon dog, and Mario looks like one in this suit. It gives him the same abilities as his raccoon costume, plus he can turn into an invulnerable statue while wearing it.

FROG MARIO

■ Mario is a much faster and more agile swimmer in his frog outfit, even if the big frog eyes on its hood make him look silly. On land, his amphibian garb allows him to jump far higher than usual.

HAMMER MARIO

■ With his Hammer Suit, Mario gets endless hammers to throw at enemies, which he lobs in an arc instead of a straight line, so practice is required. It also protects him from fire if he crouches.

RAINBOW MARIO

■ Gained by collecting rainbow stars, this useful form makes Mario invincible, but there are caveats. He repels other power-ups while wearing it, and it speeds him up, making him harder to control.

METAL MARIO

■ When Mario dons a Metal Cap his body takes on its durable properties, which protects him from enemies. While in this form he can also withstand winds and breathe underwater for an unlimited amount of time.

CAPE MARIO

■ Like his raccoon and tanooki suits, Mario's cape lets him fly for short spells. He can also glide along entire levels with it if he uses it like a hang-glider, and it gives him a spin attack too.

BALLOON MARIO

■ Perhaps more of a look than a suit, Mario's balloon form causes him to temporarily inflate and float skywards. You can steer him left and right, which allows you to collect items and dodge foes.

BUNNY MARIO

■ The bunny ears on Mario's bunny suit aren't just cute, they also take him up into the air when he flaps them, and they let him hover there for some time. The outfit allows him to hop around too.

WING MARIO

■ More of a winged cap than an actual costume, Mario's Wing Suit gives him a minute of flight each time he does a triple jump. Additionally, the wings on the cap can be employed to slow his falls.

SUBLIME SOUNDS

NOBODY SHOULD OVERLOOK THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIO IN THE MARIO SERIES AS IT'S ASSOCIATED WITH SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE GAME AUDIO OF ALL TIME, FROM UNFORGETTABLE UTTERANCES TO MUSIC THAT LINGERS IN YOUR BRAIN LONG AFTER THE CONSOLE IS TURNED OFF

» [Nintendo 64] What would Mario be without the familiar tones of Charles Martinet as his voice?

Here's a challenge – take a look at some of the screenshots here *without* any mental playback of the associated audio. Can you imagine the underground areas of *Super Mario Bros* without that recurring theme? Can you see *Super Mario 64*'s title screen without thinking "It's-a me, Mario"? If you can do that, we're impressed because we certainly can't. You can hardly blame us – even the Goombas hop to the beat in *Super Mario Bros*, and that speaks to the importance of audio as a part of the overall *Mario* experience.

The music of the *Super Mario Bros* series is extremely widely known – according to a paper titled *Video Game Music: Not Just Kid Stuff* by Matthew Belinkie of Yale University, 66% of American college students polled in 1999 could hum the main theme of *Super Mario Bros*. The ubiquity of the NES ensured that even people who didn't necessarily own a NES themselves were exposed to that tune, including Smooth McGroove, a YouTuber famed for his a capella covers of videogame music. "I first heard it at my next door neighbour's house, along with a few other NES classics they'd play over there," he says, citing it as his favourite piece of *Mario* music, explaining, "It's hard to beat the original because it set the stage for the rest!"

1985 was a year that saw a number of videogame compositions that set new standards for length and intricacy – on home computers you had the likes of Rob Hubbard's theme for *Monty On The Run*, and in arcades Hiroshi Kawaguchi's theme for *Space Harrier*. Koji Kondo's *Super Mario Bros* overworld theme certainly pushed those boundaries in the console space. Of course, the overworld music wasn't the only iconic piece in *Super Mario Bros* – just consider how often the underground theme has been reused and remixed. "It only makes sense to keep the themes going," says Smooth McGroove. "Bringing them back to life in new games with new twists has always been a delight for us fans."

In the early years, *Mario*'s soundtracks were not only musically satisfying but technologically impressive. The drum sounds in *Super Mario Bros 3* were atypical for the NES, and the realistic piano sounds in *Super Mario World* were unlike anything heard on a console up to that point. However, the musician wasn't nearly as famous as the music – in the aforementioned paper, Matthew Belinkie stated that none of the students knew the name of the veteran *Mario* series composer in 1999. Fortunately, that situation has changed these days. "Koji Kondo wrote *Mario* music with such light-hearted joy, and so it makes it fun to sing along to," says Smooth McGroove, namechecking the composer. "Many people have commented about that over the years as I've released different *Mario* tunes."

One game that Smooth McGroove has covered many tracks from is *Super Mario 64*. "It was the first 3D *Mario*, and the soundtrack was a masterpiece," he explains. "For a lot of people, it was their first introduction to Mario and so it holds a lot of fun memories. For me, it's another fantastic *Mario* soundtrack from my childhood." However, as great as the music is, *Super Mario 64*'s audio is perhaps most notable for introducing many players to Mario's voice, delivered by Charles Martinet. His whoops and yelps enhanced the joy inherent in steering Mario around his new 3D environments, and helped to add life to him as a character.

It's a point that Smooth McGroove also makes. "The sound effects are just as iconic as the music. The jump sound, the coin sounds, and his voice clips are almost universally recognisable," he says. We certainly think

> "KOJI KONDO WROTE MARIO MUSIC WITH SUCH LIGHT-HEARTED JOY, AND SO IT MAKES IT FUN TO SING ALONG TO"
> SMOOTH MCGROOVE

» [NES] Images can't emit audio, but this one comes as close as it gets.

» [NES] *Super Mario Bros 3* began a tradition by reprising the original underground theme.

» [DS] It's a shame these Goombas won't get to hop to the beat for much longer.

back fondly on Yoshi's bizarre SNES-era sound effects, and enjoy tormenting Toad a little in the modern games just because of his voice. Meanwhile, hearing the sound associated with picking up a mushroom instantly conveys the feeling of a power boost. We've even heard Bowser's roar being mentioned as the basis for a rather unflattering comparison to the sound of someone being rather unwell.

Of course, as the series has expanded, change has been inevitable. The number of audio staff has grown, with composers including Mahito Yokota and Toru Minegishi leaving their own mark on *Mario*'s audio landscape. Ever more elaborate arrangements have been performed, with recent highlights including *Super Mario Odyssey*'s *Jump Up, Super Star!*, used as the theme for an incredible *Donkey Kong*-inspired sequence. Charles Martinet has also officially retired as the voice of Mario to move into an ambassadorial role for the series, a move that felt unthinkable before it happened – but one that Nintendo marked appropriately, thanking the voice actor for his work over the years. That the fans showed an equal outpouring of love just demonstrates how important *Mario*'s soundscape really is.

» [GameCube] The music in Delfino Plaza really captures the holiday mood *Super Mario Sunshine* aims for.

MAGICAL MIXES

THERE HAVE BEEN SOME FANTASTIC REINTERPRETATIONS OF MARIO'S MUSIC OVER THE YEARS – HERE ARE OUR FAVOURITES

SUPER MARIO WORLD - OVERWORLD THEME ACAPELLA

youtu.be/ndiD8V7zpAs

Since *Super Mario World* was voted as the best game ever by **Retro Gamer** readers, lets start with the most memorable background music from the SNES classic. Smooth McGroove's interpretation of this theme is absolutely on point, and you can tell he's having a fantastic time singing it.

SUPER MARIOLAND

youtu.be/Rg56ft9pAsM

This isn't the work of a fan, but we'd be remiss not to include this Ambassadors Of Funk track – it was very likely the first track you heard that built on the music of Mario's adventures, after all. You can even listen to it guilt-free because this is an official upload

SUPER SPICE BROS 2

youtu.be/6AjhzIq42f0

Here's one of the sillier ones – MowtenDoo's mash-up of *Bob-Omb Battlefield* and the Terry Crews adverts for Old Spice. The music is admirable, but what puts this one over the top as a favourite is its video, which adds a *Mario*-themed twist to the star's bizarre body wash antics.

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY - JUMP UP, SUPER STAR! (PIANO COVER)

youtu.be/4JJFJsmliUU

As great as the full production in *Super Mario Odyssey* is, this version by Cateen manages to highlight the strength of the songwriting by stripping the tune back to a single instrument. There's some fantastic video editing to incorporate game footage alongside the music, too.

SUPER MARIO GALAXY - GUSTY GARDEN (BEN BRIGGS REMIX)

youtu.be/i7Qj7NRYCjM

Super Mario Galaxy has some absolutely beautiful music, but if you've ever wondered what it might sound like on an older console, this remix is for you. The track gets a chiptune makeover, giving it a nice retro feel without sacrificing any of its recognisable melody.

» [Switch] If you haven't seen this scene in *Super Mario Odyssey*, look it up now – it's brilliant.

VITAL VERSATILITY

MARIO'S PLATFORM GAMES ARE THE CORE OF THE SERIES, BUT THE STAR HAS DONE EVERYTHING FROM RACING HIS RIVALS TO THROWING FISTS WITH ICONS LIKE SONIC AND PAC-MAN. THAT ADAPTABILITY HAS HELPED TO ENSURE THAT THE PLUMBER'S NEXT OUTING IS NEVER FAR AWAY

They say that all the world's a stage, and Mario has certainly played a lot of roles over the years. After all, he wasn't even a plumber to begin with – he was a carpenter in *Donkey Kong*, and worked in factories in his Game & Watch years. In the 2012 *Game Informer* interview mentioned earlier in this feature, Shigeru Miyamoto explained that he sees the star and his supporting cast as akin to a troupe of actors. "If you're familiar with things like *Popeye* and some of the old comic characters, you would oftentimes see this cast of characters that takes on different roles depending on the comic or cartoon," he explained. "They might be a businessman in one [cartoon] or a pirate in another. Depending on the story that was being told, they would change roles."

That philosophy has ensured that storyline needs never get in the way of a fun concept, which has afforded Nintendo an extraordinary amount of flexibility when it comes to Mario's outings. "Quite early on, Mario would be assigned into other titles (mostly sports) and shoe-horned in some way which normalised Mario appearing in games that weren't his staple franchise," says Paul Murphy, author of *Gamebook: The Unofficial DMG Companion*. Indeed, plenty of games featured the moustachioed mascot on the box and in the game, without carrying the *Mario* branding. "Then *Super Mario Kart* arrived, showing that he could quite easily be assigned into other genres which were accepted by the Nintendo masses," Paul continues. "The rest, as they say, is history."

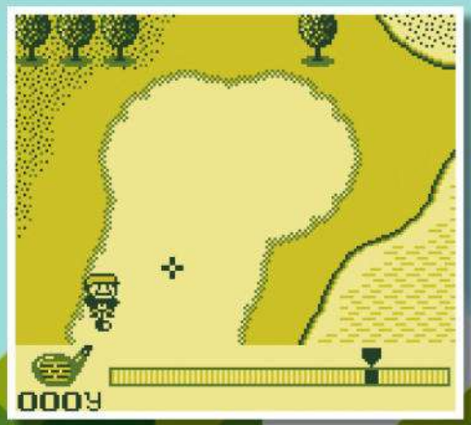
> "MARIO'S UNIVERSE IS ALWAYS CHANGING AND ADAPTING BUT THE CORE OF THE SERIES ALWAYS STAYS TRUE"
> PAUL MURPHY

The first entry in the kart-racing series established the concept of bringing Mario's extended iconography to these excursions into other genres. This was a fantastic way to convey the properties of items to existing fans – anyone familiar with Mario's previous adventures would understand that mushrooms are good and Koopa Shells hurt – but it was also a neat means of ensuring that the combat-heavy racing fit Nintendo's family friendly image. "I think the crux of Nintendo in general is that they put their own spin on genres sometimes, like *Splatoon* or *Pikmin* and you think it wouldn't work, but it's nailed every time," says Paul. "For me, this is what gives the audience the confidence to accept what is presented and give it a go."

That precedent carried over to Mario's many other spin-offs, too. *Paper Mario* might feature turn-based combat, but Mario still jumps on his enemies, and using a Boo power-up in *Mario Super Sluggers* will make your ball temporarily invisible. It doesn't matter that friends and foes sometimes pair up for a friendly game of tennis – the consistency is found in the way these games draw from the platform games. But for Paul, the most important thing carried over from the platform games is the quality they're reputed for. "Pixel-perfect control mechanics, interesting gimmicks thrown in, new characters added in with new worlds – Mario's universe is always changing and adapting but the core of the series always stays true," he tells us. "It hasn't always worked, and occasionally a stinker is thrown into the mix – but almost always it is fun."

Because of that, it's easy for Mario to star in your favourite games across a variety of genres, as Paul's list of favourite spin-offs shows. "*Mario's Picross* is a massive guilty pleasure, I probably spent more time playing that during the production of my Game Boy book than anything else," he admits. "*Mario*

» [Game Boy] It's Mario doing golf long before *Mario Golf* was a thing. Do you see?



» [SNES] *Mario Kart* is the most successful spin-off series, often outselling the platformers.

» [Nintendo 64] Everyone loves *Mario Party*, until the blisters set in. Wear those gloves, people.

» [Game Boy Color] As far as Nintendo is concerned, it doesn't matter why Mario and chums are playing tennis.

Kart goes without saying, even if my son's reflexes (and luck) outclass me time and again. It's my go-to family game and will keep you occupied for so long. *Super Mario Party* is the same and has a huge amount of playtime on my Switch," he adds. "I also must give special mention to *Paper Mario: The Origami King*. I know many folks think that *Thousand-Year Door* is the quintessential RPG for Mario enthusiasts, but I just loved the story."

Ultimately, one of the most thrilling things about Mario is that you never know where you'll see him next. We never would have guessed that he'd end up starring in a *Dance Dance Revolution* game or a turn-based tactics crossover with *Rayman*'s Rabbids, yet both happened. "It's a difficult thing to guess what Nintendo would and wouldn't do, or what would work or wouldn't," says Paul. "Would a *Mario* title work as a first-person adventure game? Could you see a Bethesda-level experience with Mario as the protagonist, with everything themed around the *Super Mario* universe? Mario in a *Souls*-like adventure? Or a post-apocalyptic universe?" These concepts might sound ludicrous on paper, but as Paul says, "I've written these things and am now wondering if they'd be fantastic. Wouldn't they?" With Nintendo involved, we'd never bet against it.

» [GameCube] In *Paper Mario* games, Goombas can be perfectly friendly – just don't defraud them.

BY THE NUMBERS

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MARIO'S EXTRA-CURRICULAR ADVENTURES

55,460,000

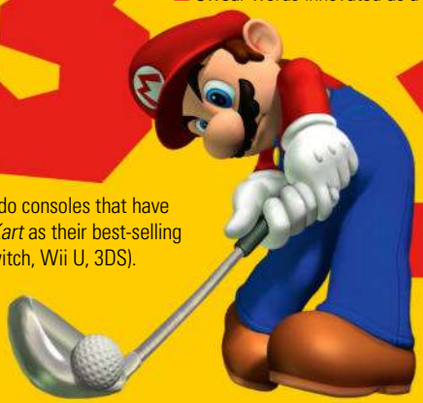
■ Copies of *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* sold (as of 30 June 2023).

4,227

■ Swear words innovated as a result of blue shell attacks.

3

■ Nintendo consoles that have a *Mario Kart* as their best-selling game (Switch, Wii U, 3DS).



15

■ Years between the release dates of the two most recent *Mario Strikers* games.

■ *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis* spin-offs developed by Camelot Software Planning.

18,350,000

■ Copies of *Super Mario Party* sold, more than the two next best-selling *Mario Party* games combined (as of 30 June 2023).

2,922,600

■ Guinness World Record score for *Dr Mario*, set by Will Nicholls in 2011.

$80 MILLION

■ Cost of issuing protective gloves to buyers of *Mario Party*, following complaints about blisters.

4

■ Times *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* reached #1 on the UK charts.

99

■ Landmarks featured in the Mac version of *Mario Is Missing!*.

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Peripheral Vision

Control Panel fact

■ The example shown here is an early GCE Vectrex Control Panel. Later ones manufactured by Milton Bradley use different overlay art, but are functionally identical.

ESSENTIAL GAME
FORTRESS OF NARZOD

With the standard controller at your disposal, you've got essentially the full range of Vectrex games to choose from – so let's go with one of the very best, this fantastic shoot-'em-up. Your goal is to fight your way up a valley to the titular fortress, and if you're able to do so you'll face Narzod himself. To do that though, you'll need to avoid not only enemy fire but your own, as it can bounce off walls and eventually rebound towards you. It's a must play, and a Vectrex exclusive.

Control Panel

» PLATFORM: Vectrex **» YEAR:** 1982 **» COST:** £25 (launch), £240+ (today, boxed), £80+ (today, unboxed)

In the early Eighties, home-console controllers tended to be vertically oriented, with a large number pad, relatively few action buttons and some kind of unusual directional input. With the Vectrex being designed to bring the arcade experience home, the default Control Panel was a horizontal design rather more in line with the arcade standard. Though it was shorter than the joysticks found on arcade cabinets, the self-centring analogue joystick was familiar to players, and the inclusion of four buttons was more than enough to handle the games of the day. When not in use, one controller could be stored in a recess beneath the console's vector display.

Unfortunately, time has revealed that the controller is perhaps the most failure-prone part of the Vectrex. The spring used to centre the joystick can fail, the potentiometers used to read the joystick's movement can become dirty and give jerky inputs, the rubber contacts for the buttons can become worn, and more. The system's short commercial life ensured that few were made, so players will now pay a premium for working controllers. ✱

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

THE MAKING OF GOLF

IT WAS AMONG THE FIRST FEW GOLF VIDEOGAMES EVER MADE. AND DUE TO THE HUGE POPULARITY OF THE ATARI 2600, IT WAS AVAILABLE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE THAN ANYTHING BEFORE IT. MIKE LORENZEN DESCRIBES HOW HE TEED UP A CLASSIC

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI INC
- **DEVELOPER:** ATARI INC
- **RELEASED:** 1980
- **PLATFORM:** ATARI 2600
- **GENRE:** SPORT

» [Atari 2600] Positioning your player correctly before you swing is a fine art.

It was 1979 and Mike Lorenzen had barely got his foot in the door at Atari Inc when he was asked to visit a shop and play a rival system. "I arrived on my first day and someone at the company had seen a golf game," Mike tells us more than 40 years on. "They gave me an address to a store where you could play it in the lobby and said, 'Implement that game exactly on the Atari 2600.' I said, 'Excuse me? That sounds illegal, immoral.' And they said, 'No, it's on a different system so it's wide open.' That was the thinking in 1979." Mike concedes that his memory of the exact other release is hazy, but he agrees with the suggestion it was probably the 1978 game *Computer Golf* for the Magnavox Odyssey. That would seem to make sense, as while his Atari game would end up being more advanced, there are similarities between the titles. And aside from the largely text-based Apple II game *Pro Golf 1*, there were simply no other contenders out there that could have been mimicked. *Golf* was one of the very first golf videogames.

In a stroke of good fortune, Mike had landed his job at Atari after a phone call to the customer service desk. "I called them asking for Atari 2600 hardware manuals," he explains. "The receptionist didn't know what to do with the call, so they sent it to the software engineering team for the videogame side of the company." It was a time when he had been busy prising apart Atari hardware and games such as *Combat* and *Basketball* to understand how they worked. "George Simcock, the manager of all Atari 2600 software engineers, answered," Mike continues, "and he said, 'That's very interesting. How did you do that? We want to meet with you tomorrow'. It was a three-hour drive and I met with

» [Atari 2600] Here we are searching for a ball lost in the rough. Tiger Woods we are not.

» [Atari 2600] The view shifts to a zoomed-in perspective on reaching the green.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CIRCUS ATARI
RELEASED: 1980
PLATFORM: ATARI 2600

PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS
RELEASED: 1984
PLATFORM: ATARI 800, ATARI 5200

PSI 5 TRADING COMPANY (PICTURED)
RELEASED: 1985
PLATFORM: VARIOUS

him, David Crane, Al Miller, Larry Kaplan and Bob Whitehead." Three months after he joined the company, those other engineers would famously leave Atari to form Activision, the world's first third-party game development company. Eventually Mike would go on to join them.

Having the skills to play ball with such prestigious names at Atari was the culmination of studying computer science at college and spending long hours honing his technical expertise. Such was Mike's obsession with computing that he spent thousands of dollars to become an early owner of his own personal computer – one of an elite few at the time. "My dad had died three days after high school. He worked for the railroad for 35 years and they gave me 20 grand for college. It was kind of like blood money and I didn't touch it for the first year of college," Mike explains.

» Mike Lorenzen made games for Atari, Activision and Accolade before working in the telephone industry.

That would change in his second year of studying, by which point he was heavily involved in a computer club. "I ended up blowing $19,000 on a two-floppy disk system fully loaded with memory. I built that and had it in my dorm room. This was probably in 1976. I couldn't get insurance for it," Mike laughs. His next big purchase would be an Atari 2600, and by the time he made that fortuitous phone call to the company, he knew the machine well enough that he had made his own development system for the console.

» [Atari 2600] Teeing off as the orange second player. Can we beat player one's score?

> "I SPENT SIX MONTHS ON GOLF, WORKING 100-HOUR WEEKS"
> MIKE LORENZEN

As with most Atari games of the time, creating *Golf* was very much a solo endeavour. "At Atari, it was a single-person project. You made your own game, you made the graphics, you wrote the manual," Mike remembers. That meant long slogs of programming to a tight timeframe. "I spent six months on *Golf*, working 100-hour weeks," he recounts. Part of the challenge was that, at that time, Atari 2600 games still needed to fit into just 2,000 bytes. It was a tiny amount of memory to work with, even compared to later games for the same system which could be up to four ▶

FORE! MORE CLASSIC GOLF GAMES TO TRY

LEADERBOARD

YEAR: 1986

■ Magazines heaped praise on this 1986 golf-sim, which was available on the major 8-bit home computers of the time and offered great variety with 72 holes to play. *Zzap!64* commended the "tremendously realistic animation and perspective" and the gameplay that "couldn't be easier to get into".

NINJA GOLF

YEAR: 1990

■ We couldn't help but sneak this Atari 7800 wildcard onto our list. Whilst running between shots, you'll punch, kick and shuriken various ninjas and monsters off the fairway. It has gained fans in recent years after being made available on the first Atari collection for Evercade consoles.

NEO TURF MASTERS

YEAR: 1996

■ Nazca eschewed realism for colourful cartoon graphics and fast-paced arcade action in its 1996 game, which was titled *Big Tournament Golf* in Japan. Delightful to look at and easy to play, it has ports on modern platforms including iOS and Android and remains enormous fun.

MARIO GOLF

YEAR: 1999

■ Mario's second golf event after NES *Open Tournament Golf*, this N64 game brought all your favourite Nintendo characters to the course. Owners of a Transfer Pak could swap score data and characters with the Game Boy Color game of the same name, which included an entertaining Story mode.

COVER ART CAPERS

STEVE HENDRICKS ON ILLUSTRATING FOR ATARI INC

HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK FOR ATARI INC, STEVE?

Back in 1977, about six months after moving to the Bay Area, I was showing my illustration portfolio around town and ended up getting a call from Jim Kelly at Atari asking me to come in for an interview. He said that they were looking for an illustrator and had received a call from the design firm I had just showed my portfolio to who said I was just the guy they were looking for. After showing my book to Jim, George Opperman and Bob Flemate, they must have liked what they saw and offered me the job. And for the first two years or so, I worked in the coin-op division working for George creating artwork for the arcade game cabinets before moving into the consumer division to create 2600 cover artwork.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS FOR CREATING COVERS BACK THEN?

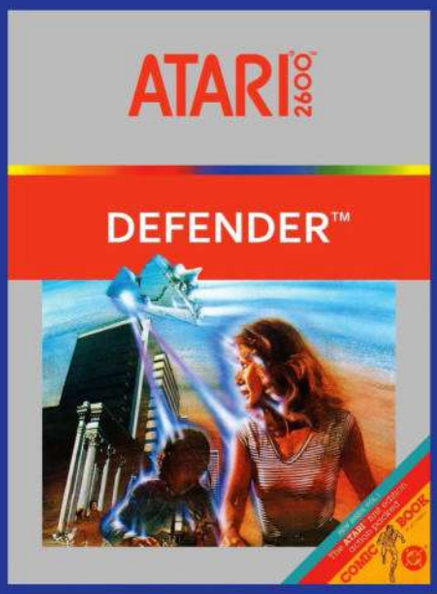
The process for creating each game cover was about the same. First, I would meet with the game designer to review the game and discuss the key gameplay features. After, we played the game and I would ask any questions I might have. Then I would start to create concepts for the cover by sketching thumbnail ideas for the layout of the illustration, trying to incorporate any features the game designer had shared with me. The theme of most of the games was very straightforward, like *Golf*. Others needed a bit more of a backstory to understand the full scope of the game, like *War Lords* or *Defender*. The goal was to create an illustration that would not only capture the theme of the game but would attract potential gamers with colourful imagery and realistic features to inspire their imagination.

WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES OF ILLUSTRATING *GOLF*?

Golf was my first cover painting using the montage style that Cliff Spohn had created – it was the Atari look in the early days. I actually created two different paintings for the game. The first one didn't come out as good as I would have liked, so I did a second painting. It gave me more practice using the illustration technique Cliff was using on the covers.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE AMONG THE COVERS YOU CREATED?

My favourite is probably *Defender*. Atari was just a super fun place to work. And it gave me a great opportunity to develop as an illustrator. So glad to hear you say how those covers help bring the game to life for you. That was exactly our goal. In much the same way that a paperback book cover brings to life the storyline of the book.



» As well as being an illustrator, Steve also modelled in this 1978 Atari advert.

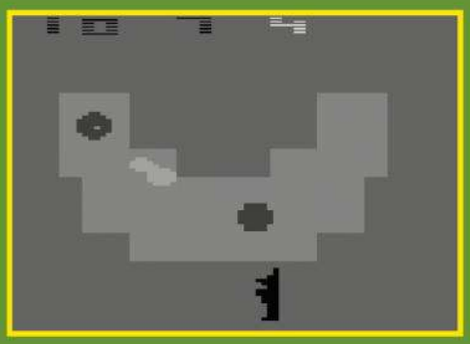
times larger. "Back then you would write the game bigger and then you would make it fit into the ROM. 4KB ROMs were just coming out, but *Golf* was 2K. I first made the game to be about 3.7K, then I had to constantly optimise it until it got to 2K which would have taken days if not weeks. And you'd try not to give up any gameplay – it's a stressful period. I remember it was three or four days without sleep in the last big push." There was also a pesky bug to deal with. "There's always one bug that chases your ass," muses Mike. "For a long time – and a long time might have been just a week – the damn golf ball would get lost between the fairway and the green."

At least Mike had the support of senior colleagues for some of the development time. "For the first three months, Al Miller, Dave Crane, Larry Kaplan and others were there," Mike says. "They were obviously the go-to people. Seventy to eighty percent of Atari games at that time were made by them. I was Al Miller's apprentice and he was my primary go-to guy. When they left, I became the person other people would come to for help." Mike remembers one particular moment where he perhaps got David Crane, the esteemed creator of games such as *Pitfall!*, on a bad day, which led to David sternly reprimanding him. "But later on, he and I became best buddies, because we were the technical ones who liked reverse-engineering things," Mike says.

The result of all Mike's hard work was a straightforward but very gratifying golfing experience that packed some clever features for the time and still holds up well today. Mike's game puts you in control of a pixelated golfer with a wind-up club and a burning ambition to play the best possible round

"HOW IN THE WORLD DID I GET ALL THAT INTO 2,000 BYTES?" MIKE LORENZEN

» [Atari 2600] The fairway is nice and clear ahead, if we can just squeeze between those bunkers.



» [Atari 2600] Greyscale mode works well, but good luck finding balls out of bounds.

» [Atari 2600] Left idle, the game cycles through some vibrant colour themes.

of golf. Holding fire draws back your swing, determining the power of the shot, until you release the button and let loose on the ball. Positioning your golfer at the best angle for the shot is crucial and there's quite a knack to getting this right. It does take a little while to get used to, but once everything clicks, you're left with some very satisfying mechanics. The promise of perfecting your swing and lowering your score gives the nine-hole course replay value, as does the inclusion of an entertaining two-player mode. Although much like the real sport, you may find yourself howling with frustration at times when things don't go your way. Especially if you flip the physical switch on the Atari 2600 that turns on Hard mode, which enables your ball to get lost beyond the fairway, meaning you may lose countless shots hacking away in the rough attempting to find it. Perhaps this is a homage to Mike's own golf-ball hunting sessions with his father. "My dad enjoyed golf," he remembers. "There were times when we went every week. Even when I got to my teenage years, I didn't enjoy golf, but I would go for the walk. What I really enjoyed was looking for lost golf balls. My dad would pay me a penny for a ball. If it was one brand I'd get a nickel, and if it was a super-duper good brand I'd get a dime."

One striking feature of *Golf* is that whenever you hit a shot close to the hole, the perspective of the game changes to a zoomed-in view of the green and your player. It's a neat visual shift, albeit not an entirely original one, as the previously mentioned Magnavox Odyssey game *Computer Golf* did a more basic version of something similar. Back when Mike was first sent to play that game out at a shop, he defied the order to make a direct copy. "I played the game for a few hours and made mental notes. But I was not going to make a copy. I was going to make an enhanced version, a statement," he says. True to his word, while *Golf* shares a wind-up golfer and close-up green views with *Computer Golf*, it's far beyond a simple clone and proves to be a more refined experience than that earlier game. Colourful graphics, sand and water hazards, varied courses and a par for each hole being displayed are just a few of the notable distinctions.

Mike says game designers at Atari were not privy to precise sales figures, but he suspects *Golf* did well for its relative niche in the Atari catalogue. Shortly after *Golf*, Mike made *Circus Atari* in the same year, a port of the *Breakout*-style block-busting arcade game, and then later turned down the chance to develop the Atari port of *Pac-Man*, which went to Todd Frye instead.

After working in the computer division of Atari, Mike left to join his old colleagues at Activision and then Accolade, where his work included the intricate but light-hearted space management game *Psi 5 Trading Company*. You can also find Mike's name in court documents for the 1992 Sega versus Accolade lawsuit, which was brought forth after he helped to reverse-engineer the Mega Drive. Accolade lost the case, in which it had wanted to bypass security measures restricting game development to Sega licence-holders. But Mike wasn't directly implicated and if anything seemed only to gain respect after the proceedings for his technical nous.

While he long ago left game development to work in the telephone industry, Mike looks back with some wonder on the golf game he managed to ship in 1980. "How in the world did I get all that into 2,000 bytes?" he ponders, and it's a fantastic question.

» [Atari 2600] Sand bunkers, trees and water hazards will frustrate your attempts to make par.

Super Columns

A KICK IN THE JEWELS

RETROREVIVAL

» GAME GEAR » 1995 » SEGA CS5

You've got to admire Sega's persistence with *Columns*. Common sense would suggest that since the original was a common pack-in with the console, Game Gear owners were unlikely to be incredibly excited for the fifth *Columns* game of the decade. Common sense be damned though, this was *Super Columns* – a game upgraded with a new Story mode, extra attacking options and the ability to turn your columns into rows by rotating them. Take that, *Puyo Puyo*.

In fairness, the gameplay does feel significantly different, especially in competitive matches as you now have the ability to really mess with your opponent. With the Story mode consisting entirely of battles against the CPU, this focus on creating meaningful interaction is welcome. Creating combos will push your opponent's base level up as usual, but you also have access to five magical spells earned by accumulating points. These spells allow you to lower your own base level, prevent your opponent from rotating or changing the order of their jewels, or even create a magical gem.

Unfortunately, the whole experience is tainted by a couple of major flaws. You can still lose columns mid-drop and it happens very frequently in this game, making it pointless to save for an expensive magic gem that you may never get to place. Compounding this is the fact that the cheapest spell forces the opponent to place a column of stone blocks, which are almost impossible to remove, meaning that the most effective strategy is simply to use that low-level spell repeatedly to harass the opponent.

By the time the series eliminated the frustration factor of losing your column mid-drop in *Hanagumi Taisen Columns*, the whole battle model had changed from the classic base-raising battle to incorporate falling garbage with a timer, akin to *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. It's a real shame, as *Super Columns* comes so close to being a brilliant update of competitive *Columns* gameplay.

5
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A TRIBUTE TO FIRST STAR SOFTWARE INC

RICHARD SPITALNY

■ Originally a film producer, First Star Software cofounder Richard Spitalny got into games publishing as a sideline, and stayed there until 2018 when he retired.

FROM ITS INCEPTION IN 1982 UNTIL ITS CLOSURE IN 2018, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE WAS A BYWORD FOR INNOVATION. COFOUNDER RICHARD SPITALNY REVISITS THE FIRM'S BOULDER DASH AND SPY VS SPY SERIES, AND REVEALS HIDDEN GEMS

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

First Star Software got its start in late-1982 with its debut title *Astro Chase,* and the following year its author produced the similarly popular paint-'em-up *Bristles.* First Star's early Eighties output was then bolstered by arcade-style submissions to the firm like *Panic Button* and *Flip And Flop*. Peter Liepa's cave-based crystal hunt *Boulder Dash* followed, and it received three sequels during the mid-Eighties.

It was a similar story with the superlative action title *Spy Vs Spy*, a best-seller with two follow-ups released by 1986. First Star also licensed *Superman*, firstly for 1986's *Superman: The Game* and then 1989's *Superman: The Man Of Steel*.

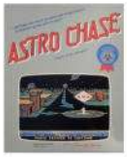
In the late-Eighties and early Nineties the company regularly licensed its IP to others, with highlights being *Rockford The Arcade Game* and *Spy Vs Spy: Operation Boobytrap*. First Star also published the adventure *Omnicron Conspiracy*, the crime caper *Security Alert* and the beat-'em-up *Millenium Warriors* during this time.

Following an eight-year hiatus where First Star founder Richard Spitalny worked for the developer Imergy, a wealth of popular *Boulder Dash* releases appeared online and on mobile platforms, from 2003's *Boulder Dash ME* to 2014's *Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary*. *Spy Vs Spy* was also reimagined, for consoles in 2005 and tablets in 2012. *Boulder Dash* was a draw on consoles too, with titles like 2007's *Boulder Dash Rocks!* and 2011's *Boulder Dash-XL* being of particular note.

Then as it had started out, First Star Software went out on a high, when in 2017 its name and assets were sold to BBG Entertainment. In 2021, BBG released the well-received *Boulder Dash Deluxe*, which bodes well for First Star's legacy. ✱

ASTRO CHASE

VARIOUS · 1982



★ Considering that it was developed at a time when many computer games were shameless coin-op clones, *Astro Chase* is impressively original. Fernando Herrara's intense scrolling shooter tasks you with taking out mines before they destroy the Earth. These are tricky to target as they never stop moving, and your mission is made harder by the alien craft that home in on your position with all guns blazing.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"There was a tremendous amount of innovation in *Astro Chase*, and that was all attributable to Fernando Herrara. We self-published it until I made a deal with Parker Brothers for the right to publish the cartridge versions. We got $250,000 as an advance on royalties, and that guaranteed our future."

FLIP & FLOP

VARIOUS · 1983

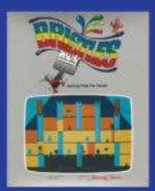
★ Like *Q*bert*, the objective of *Flip & Flop* is to change the colour of tiles on an isometric playfield while avoiding persistent enemies. Where it differentiates itself is with its two player characters: a kangaroo and a monkey, which you play one after another. The second twist is that its monkey stages are upside down, and have him hanging from the tiles.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"Jim Nangano worked in a top-secret navy facility while he was making *Flip & Flop*. He would post us disks, and we insisted he stamped them confidential. He finally told us it was taking him ages to leave work, because he first had to prove these confidential disks just had a game on them!"

BRISTLES

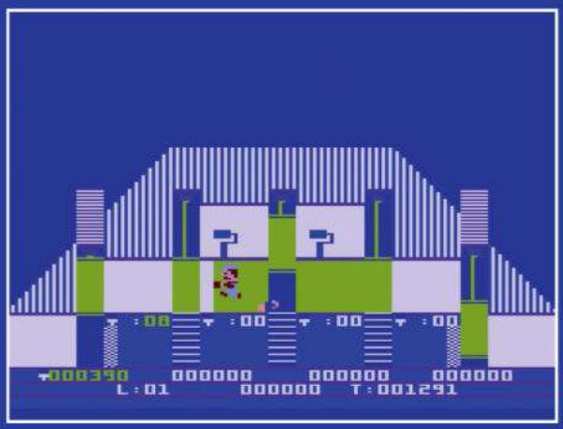
VARIOUS · 1983



★ The trick to *Bristles* is timing; without it you don't stand a chance. The idea is to get the rooms in a series of houses painted against the clock. To complicate matters, the elevators in these dwellings move at deadly speeds, and there are foes and objects that want to kill you. But if you work out the movement patterns of these hazards you can make brisk progress.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"Fernando was very definite that having done *Astro Chase* he didn't want to do another shoot-'em-up, I think he wanted to prove that there was a lot more to his creativity. So *Bristles* was a combination of us wanting to be different and wanting to appeal to both male and female players. I remember suggesting that to Fernando because I had two daughters."



MANIC MECHANICS

A LOOK AT THE FAST-PACED PAINT-'EM-UP'S GAMEPLAY

ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE

Fixed-screen space shooters dominated early Eighties gaming, but the hazard-plagued house decorating in *Bristles* bucked that trend with its novel mechanics.

ELEVATOR ACTION

The elevators in *Bristles* are insanely fast. They're deadly if you're under them when they move down a floor, and their speed helps create frenetic gameplay.

ECLECTIC ENEMIES

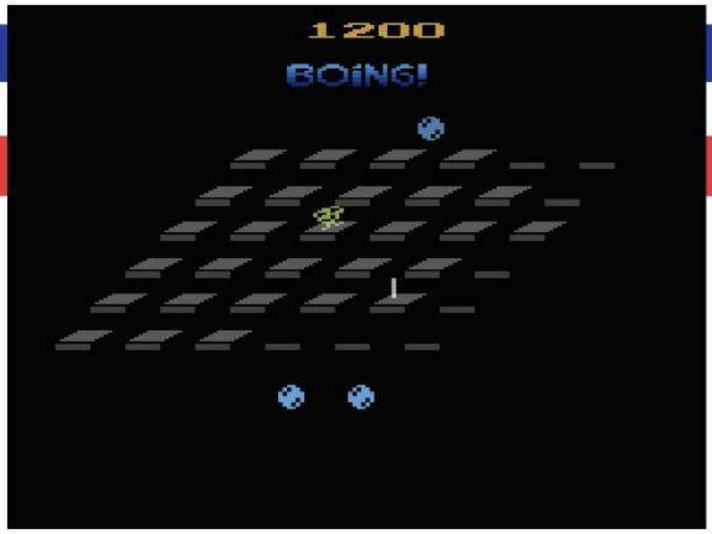
Bristles' foes all behave differently. Flying Half Pints speed across the screen, Dumb Buckets block elevators and Brenda leaves handprints on painted walls.

SUPERB STAGES

As well as their unique layouts and foes, *Bristles*' levels gradually introduce fresh features like painting walls the same colour and decorating in the dark.

CHARACTER BUILDING

Unusually for an Eighties game, there's a whole cast of player characters in *Bristles* for you to play as, with both male and female protagonists available.



BOING!

ATARI 2600 • 1984

★ On first inspection, *Boing!* looks a lot like *Q*bert*, but it was actually developed before Gottlieb's coin-op was released. This becomes obvious when you look at its unique features, like the fact that one of its enemies will take out its opposite number as readily as it dispatches the player character. Another of its novel features is that on some of its levels you have to clear certain rows of tiles before others. It also has stages with invisible tiles.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"Someone at Atari saw *Boing!*, and said we should call it *Jump* after the Van Halen song, and get that music for our game. In order to do that we had to send them a licence fee, so I mailed a cheque, but I forgot to sign it! Then there was the fiasco with *ET*, so the tie-in never happened, and I saved First Star $30,000."

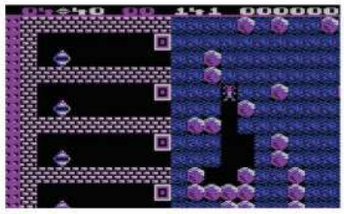
BOULDER DASH

VARIOUS • 1984

★ Although progress through *Boulder Dash*'s levels depends on collecting gems and avoiding opponents, at its core it's all about solving puzzles. The routes you dig through its underground stages are all-important. If you accidentally dislodge the wrong boulder you can get crushed or trap a gem. Then if you free a trapped enemy you can dramatically increase your challenge, although this is often necessary in order to reach gems, which makes fast reflexes essential.

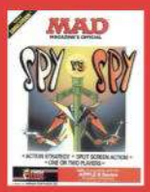
RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"*Boulder Dash* was always *you* playing against yourself, and the gameplay was so ingenious in terms of getting you to go back and do better. I sensed that from the beginning. Did we think it was going to be one of the best-selling games ever? No. But we all thought it was a really good game."



SPY VS SPY

VARIOUS • 1984



★ Not only does *Spy Vs Spy* respect its source material, but its gameplay benefits from doing so. Adapted from *Mad Magazine*'s tales of two rival spies, First Star's title has you setting traps for an opponent while trying to deactivate theirs. You also have to collect items in a suitcase and escape with them in a plane. However your nemesis is also after them, so be prepared to deter him with a wooden club!

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"I wanted to split the screen, and have one player at the top going in one direction and the other at the bottom going in the opposite direction. So I asked Mike Riedel if he could do that. He didn't know, but he said he would try. My ignorance of what was possible meant I just put it all out there."

ABSURD ASSIGNMENT

TOP-SECRET TIPS ON YOUR IMPLAUSIBLE MISSION

BEAT-HIM-UP!

All efforts to sneak around go out the window when the two rivals meet. Your choices are to run away or beat your opponent senseless with your trusty wooden club!

RIOTOUS REMEDIES

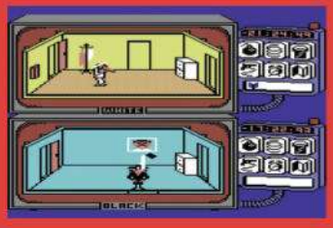
The wise spy aims to deactivate traps. Clever fixes include snuffing out the fuses of bombs with buckets of water and snipping springs with wire cutters.

TRICKY TRAPS

Setting traps is optional, but watching your foe trigger them is half the fun. It also drains their energy, and when that's gone it's game over for them.

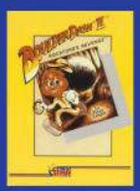
OBJECT LESSON

The objective of the spies' mission, besides surviving it, is to locate and escape with four objects: a passport, money, a key and some top-secret plans.



BOULDER DASH II: ROCKFORD'S REVENGE

VARIOUS · 1985



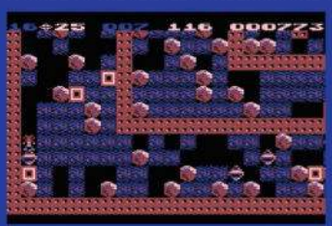
★Since the main attraction of *Boulder Dash* was solving the fiendish puzzles in its caves there was little point in Peter Liepa tearing up his game's core concepts and starting again when it came to designing its sequel. Thankfully Peter agreed, although he did add a few new features. There's slime, for example, which rocks and crystals will sit on top of for a short while before falling through it. Then there are enchanted and expanding walls. The latter of these grows horizontally, which can trap the player character and his enemies, whereas the former turns boulders into crystals and crystals into boulders if you drop one or the other on top of them.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"We didn't want to reinvent the wheel, we had a good thing, and that gave us the ability to bring *Boulder Dash II* out quickly. I know that there were some people who said that aside from the slime and growing walls it was really the same game. OK, but it was all new puzzles, and Peter's puzzles were worth their weight in gold."

CAVE DWELLERS

A GUIDE TO THE SEQUEL'S UNDERGROUND ODDITIES

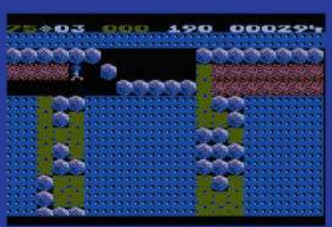


FIREFLIES

These strangely square organisms move in a clockwise pattern and explode when you drop things on them, often taking out nearby walls.

BUTTERFLIES

Much like fireflies, butterflies explode when objects hit them, but they leave behind crystals. They move in anti-clockwise patterns.

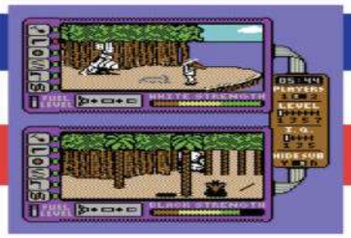


AMOEBAS

Amoebas can trap you by growing around you. Left unchecked they turn into boulders, but if you confine them they turn into crystals.

SLIME

Items don't instantly fall through slime, but once they do they can become unreachable, so quickly grab any crystals that land on it.



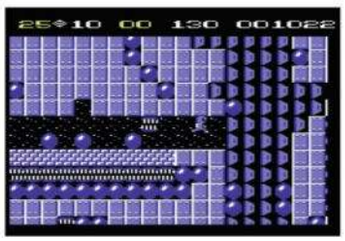
SPY VS SPY: THE ISLAND CAPER

VARIOUS · 1985

★Although it would be an exaggeration to describe *The Island Caper*'s gameplay as open world, it feels that way after playing the original *Spy Vs Spy*. The reason being that it's set on a desert island, so you can set traps anywhere you like on the shores of its sandy beaches. The game's tropical environment also opens up the scope for environmental hazards that couldn't exist in the first game's embassy locations, such as quicksand that you have to waggle the joystick back and forth to get free of, and sharks that swim offshore of its island playfield. The sequel's combat and its collection-based goal are taken from its popular predecessor, which is no bad thing.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"We wanted to give the spies new things to do, and putting them in a different environment gave us all these options. There could be different traps, because you had coconuts and trees, and you had sand, so everything looked very different from the original. We kept the core mechanics of carrying around multiple objects, so there were similarities, but we used different metaphors for the challenges."



BOULDER DASH III

VARIOUS · 1986

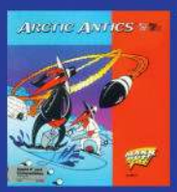
★With hindsight, it's a wonder the developers of *Boulder Dash III* thought they wouldn't get themselves into hot water given its similarity to First Star's games. Admittedly it's set in space, has unique colour schemes and has an astronaut hero, but in terms of gameplay it's an absolute copy of *Boulder Dash*. The positives are its new cave designs, which, if not up to Peter Liepa's standards, at least prove to be suitably challenging. Where these levels fall down slightly is with their reliance on testing the player's reflexes more than their puzzle-solving prowess. But they're still fun to play, despite not requiring as much use of your grey matter.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"The developers differentiated the look of *Boulder Dash III* from our earlier games, but it was still a rip-off in every sense of the word. We told them that we could either close them down or we could partner, and they could pay us a royalty. So that's what we did, and I think that was a mistake. It's maybe the thing I'm least proud of in terms of the decisions I made."

SPY VS SPY III: ARCTIC ANTICS

VARIOUS · 1986



★There are some fantastic new features in *Arctic Antics*, like its Heat Meter, which you have to top up at a fireside in an igloo if you get pelted with too many snowballs. This method of ranged combat is an equally novel idea, albeit one that takes a good bit of practice before you get good at it. The follow-up's traps are similarly inventive, and in particular, bringing down icicles on your rival's head never gets old.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"Jim Nangano did a lot of the work for *Spy Vs Spy III*. It really could have been better from a gameplay standpoint, but I still think it's pretty good. In all fairness to Jim, he knew it wasn't quite ready, but I had to draw a line. There was just too much at stake, we had to make Christmas."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO SET TRAPS FOR YOUR RIVAL

SAW

Typically, holes are sawed in ice to fish in, but in *Arctic Antics* the holes you saw are for your opponent to fall into.

ICE PICK

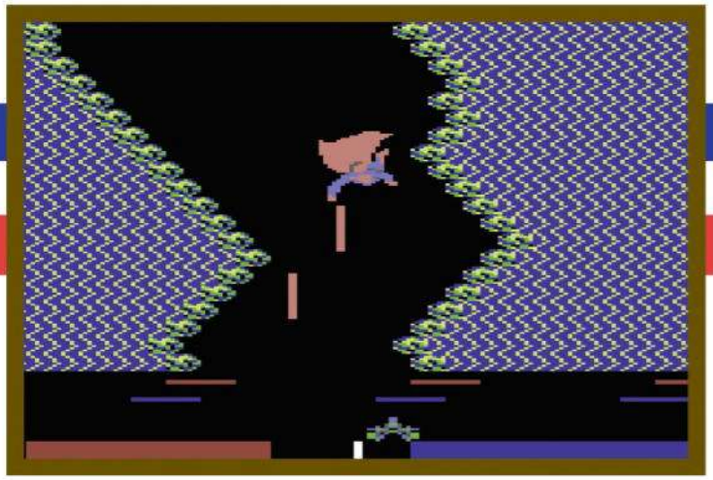
The icicles in *Arctic Antics* just hang there unless hit with an ice pick, then they fall on any spy that walks past them.

BUCKET

Although usually harmless, buckets of water turn into icy death traps if you splash them where your enemy is walking.

DYNAMITE

The dynamite in *Arctic Antics* can be attached to most items in order to blow up your hapless foe when they inspect them.



SUPERMAN: THE GAME

VARIOUS · 1986

★It's a great shame that *Superman: The Game* isn't more intuitive to play. It also lacks cohesion, and doesn't give the player much sense of purpose. That's not to say that there isn't much to admire about First Star's superhero title, because there is. It's a visually impressive game with a number of compelling and distinct challenges, the majority of which have clear objectives. You have to know where to find them, however, and there's a fair bit of grinding involved to get to them. Another issue is that there are just too many of them, and without realising you can jump from one to another without feeling like you've progressed or being clear on what you've achieved. A linear structure might have cleared up this confusion, and some simplification of the top-down firefights that branch off to the game's other levels might have made them easier to understand. It's frustrating, because *Superman: The Game* undoubtedly has a lot of potential.

ROCKFORD: THE ARCADE GAME

VARIOUS · 1988

★Mastertronic's coin-op doesn't deviate from the original *Boulder Dash* formula in terms of gameplay. Instead, it differentiates itself with its themed worlds. In each one, Rockford takes on a different persona: an explorer, a chef, a cowboy, a spaceman and a medic, and the environments, objects and opponents in these different worlds reflect his profession. So as a chef he collects apples and dodges oranges. Aesthetics aside, the game's puzzles provide a suitably stiff challenge.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"We got paid to develop it, and we got a very big advance from Mastertronic. The guys who were running Mastertronic had always really loved *Boulder Dash*, but we never could quite come to terms on a deal. Then it approached us to make an arcade game, and we did that. Fernando was in charge of its design, and we also brought Peter Liepa back in to do some of the caves."

SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL

VARIOUS · 1989

★ There's a lot of variety to *The Man Of Steel*'s stages in terms of their perspectives and gameplay, and it serves the game well that these are based on proven concepts. Its impressive-looking first level channels *Space Harrier*, and has Superman flying into the screen, battling Darkseid's soldiers. As with the later side-on and top-down shoot-'em-up and beat-'em-up stages, you have access to various super powers, and you can cycle through them. You have heat vision for long-range attacks, super fists for brawling, super breath to blow enemies away and of course flight. The game's one failing is that its opening level is overly challenging.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"We wanted to differentiate *The Man Of Steel* from our first *Superman* game. I've never quite been able to figure out what went wrong with that. I think perhaps we tried to do too much. In the US we say, 'Keep it simple, stupid!' Well *Man Of Steel* benefitted from adopting that approach, although it was mostly programmed in England by one of our partners there."

SUPER STAGES

THE ECLECTIC LEVELS OF THE SUPERHERO ACTION GAME

DEADLY DEMONS

Imagine *Space Harrier* with punching, heat-vision blasts and blowing demonic opponents into the screen. That pretty much describes *The Man Of Steel*'s challenging first stage.

BATTLESHIP BRAWL

The Man Of Steel's second challenge is to free a battleship from Darkseid's thugs. The goal is to fight your way to the far end of the ship while they try to drive you back.

SHUTTLE SKIRMISH

A spin on Atari's *Asteroids*, where Superman has to blast space debris and Kryptonite down to size in order to protect a space shuttle. Avoiding the Kryptonite is a must.

DEMENTED DROIDS

Similar to the battleship challenge, but with combat robots as your opponents. These include heat-seeking suicide drones, and walkers that trap Superman in energy cages.

OMNICRON CONSPIRACY

VARIOUS · 1989

★ Although it's a keyboard-based menu-driven adventure, *Omnicron Conspiracy* otherwise feels like a LucasArts point-and-click title. You play a space cop investigating the disappearance of a fellow officer. Your goal is to find evidence and interview non-player characters in the hope of getting clues. Their responses are often humorous, as is the game as a whole. For example, if its hero isn't sitting down when his ship launches into hyperspace he ends up clinging onto its control panel!

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"*Omnicron Conspiracy* was Jim Nangano's vision, but we didn't have the resources, in truth, in terms of the necessary personnel to take it to its proper resolution. This was at a point when First Star was on its own because Warner had given us back the company. So Jim did the core programming, and Epyx finished the game. It was a dream project for him, and it still stands up."

BOULDER DASH

VARIOUS · 1990

★ As well as looking and sounding much more like a coin-op than Peter Liepa's original, Data East's arcade game also riffs on its gameplay. An obvious tweak is that instead of falling the second you excavate dirt from under them, boulders wobble before they drop, which gives you more time to get out of their way. Then there's the arcade game's Rescue mode, which frees you when you get trapped between rocks at the cost of losing time. Lastly, there are animated backdrops behind the dirt that are gradually revealed as you dig your way through it.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"Data East did a great job with this. It would send us videotapes of its progress, which I actually still have, and we were in control of our IP, because we had approval milestones that we had to sign off. That helped Data East, so it was a win/win for everybody. The game did really well, and it was a really good deal for us because it was a licence deal."

SECURITY ALERT

COMMODORE 64 · 1991

★ On first inspection, *Security Alert* looks like a complicated robbery sim, but in actual fact it has just got a busy layout of options to interact with. The overall objective is to break into buildings and steal valuables, with the twist being that the buildings are fitted with every theft deterrent under the sun. These range from locked doors to robot guards, and everything in between. You can work out countermeasures for some of them, like placing mirrors in front of surveillance cameras, but others just have to be avoided. You can switch between a top-down perspective to a third-person viewpoint, which is handy for gauging the height of infrared beams.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"*Security Alert* is a gem that's been passed over by most people. It had a lot of stuff that was new to gaming, like taking on the persona of someone breaking into buildings, and elements you would usually only see in movies."

SERIOUS SAFEGUARDS

THE DEVIOUS DETERRENTS IN THE C64 CROOK SIM

CAMERAS

Getting caught on camera isn't advised in *Security Alert*, as it tips off robot guards who apprehend you and call the police.

HEAT DETECTOR

If you need to get past a heat detector then you'll have to find a spray can, as these can neutralise the detector's effects.

MOTION DETECTOR

Believe it or not, the motion detectors in *Security Alert* aren't set off if you simply walk or crawl very slowly past them.

INFRARED BEAMS

These devious deterrents aren't visible to the naked eye, but you can find infrared goggles that will show you where they are.

MILLENIUM WARRIORS

COMMODORE 64 · 1991

★ There's a fair amount that separates *Millenium Warriors* from other C64 beat-'em-ups. Most obviously, the game takes place in a number of different time periods: the Stone Age, the Mediaeval era, the age of pirates, the ancient Middle East and the future. When you're fighting as a caveman you use a wooden club, and when you're a knight or pirate you find yourself in a sword fight. Then the battles in the last two time periods aren't even technically beat-'em-ups, in that they're based around exchanging fire with your opponent using ranged weapons. Beyond its eclectic levels *Millenium Warriors* also stands out for its multiple stat bars, which consist of a standard energy bar that reflects damage, a health bar that reflects energy expended and a weapon bar that reflects the toll taken on your weapons. Losing all your energy or health costs you a life, although your health can be restored by collecting food that occasionally appears, which adds some strategy to the game's battles.

SPY VS SPY: OPERATION BOOBYTRAP

GAME BOY · 1992

★ While the earlier games in the series utilised a split-screen, you need two Game Boys linked together to play two-player games of *Operation Boobytrap*. Aside from that it's remarkably faithful to the original. Unlike its predecessor, it's set in various different locations, from the tropics to snowy plains. These varied environments are host to natural hazards, such as man-eating plants, geysers and icicles, but the greatest danger in the game is your rival. As in the earlier *Spy Vs Spy* titles, you can set traps for one another. The hilarious options include axes that you set against statues ready to fall on your opponent's head and batteries that you fling into clouds that zap your unsuspecting foe with lightning. You also have to fill a briefcase with secret documents to finish levels, which you keep hold of by winning fistfights with your sworn enemy.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"In order to get Kotobuki to make the game I actually did graphics myself as ideas for its design. I was obsessed with getting [them] to develop *Operation Boobytrap*, so I pitched them the game by showing them graphics that I had created on an old Mac, just to demonstrate what it could look like. It had little log bridges that you could go along, and a lot of that came from me. But the overall design process was letting Kotobuki do what was best for the Japanese market."

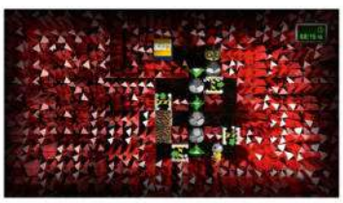
BOULDER DASH ROCKS!

VARIOUS · 2007

★ More than any other title in the series, *Boulder Dash Rocks!* layers new features on top of the core mechanics established by the original game. Rockford gets a ray gun, for example, which can pull or push far off boulders once it's powered-up. There are also underwater levels, where the hero has limited oxygen. Rockford also has a rival, in the form of a giant octopus that he has boss fights with. In these, he has to block paths with boulders so the massive sea creature can't grab a special crystal with its tentacles.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"We did *Boulder Dash Rocks!* with 10tacle Studios, and I was very much involved with designing it. It was really a function of wanting to bring the game forward in time so that it had the elements modern gamers were looking for. Everything from the colours to the cave designs were chosen to ensure it would be viewed in a contemporary fashion. We also looked at the DS' hardware, and we came up with ideas that were unique to it, like we used the stylus with the Route Race mode."



BOULDER DASH-XL

VARIOUS · 2011

★ Rockford is reimagined as a mining droid with a robotic girlfriend called Crystal in *Boulder Dash-XL*, and both are playable characters. The game's main event is its 100 level Arcade mode, which plays much like the original *Boulder Dash*, although it adds new foes and fresh features, including a health bar, explosives and detonators, locked doors requiring keys, one-way gates and speed power-ups. In addition, *XL* has a Zen mode – the Arcade mode without a time limit; a Puzzle mode, where forward planning is all-important; a Retro mode, which recreates the original game's look with polygons, and Score Attack, which rewards you for finishing stages quickly.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"*Boulder Dash-XL*'s Puzzle mode was my idea, and I designed a lot of the levels for that. It was very difficult when I had been playing *Boulder Dash* titles for decades, because I had to consciously step back and put myself in the shoes of someone who had never played any of the games. But I tried to ramp up the difficulty of the levels with that in mind."

BOULDER DASH 30TH ANNIVERSARY

VARIOUS · 2014

★ Although *Boulder Dash: 30th Anniversary* retains the core gameplay that's present in the original, it adds to almost every other aspect of Peter Liepa's design. The key enhancements are a structure that's based on unlockable themed worlds, new characters with bonuses such as speed and extra time to complete levels, power-ups that can be bought with gold found in treasure chests, and diagonal movement and walls. It also boasts new opponents, including a dragon, and some of its 220 stages were designed by the three people who had input into the design of the original *Boulder Dash*: Peter Liepa, Chris Gray and Richard Spitalny.

RICHARD'S MEMORIES

"*Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary* was Chris Gray's idea; it took us a long time to get Peter Liepa involved too. Peter is very much a traditionalist, and it took him a while to come to terms with the game's new concepts. Even the core gameplay is not quite the same to someone who absolutely knows the original. But he came around, and the caves he designed for it were amazing. He incorporated a lot of the game's new features in them, which was very exciting to me."

» [PC] All of the game's graphics have been completely redrawn to take full advantage of the PC's 256 VGA colours.

» [PC] The trench run level looks and plays very differently from the SNES original.

SUPER STAR WARS

A graphically enhanced version of Super Star Wars was on its way to MS-DOS PCs, but never reached its target. Why wasn't the Force with the developers?

Words by Paul Kautz

» Samuel Sebastian Nova, born in 1970, was the game's programmer. He's working in the biomedical technology sector in Switzerland now.

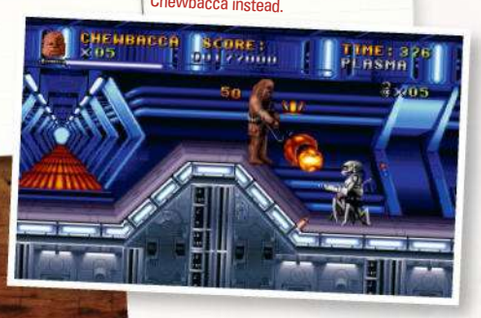
IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** RAINBOW ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** BRAIN BUG

» **SYSTEM:** PC

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 1995



» [PC] Initially you only play as Luke Skywalker. Later stages give you the chance to control Han Solo or Chewbacca instead.

Super Star Wars was a stellar game. It was developed by LucasArts and Sculptured Software in 1992 and released for the Super Nintendo to great acclaim. It was not the first *Star Wars* platformer – that honour goes to Namco's 1987 Famicom exclusive *Star Wars*, but it sure was the first to capture the magic of the first film in its entirety, with varied levels, challenging boss fights and some of the finest 3D scenes ever to utilise the console's legendary Mode 7 graphic mode.

The games press of the time could barely contain their enthusiasm: "This is the best platform/arcade adventure I've played for a long while!" said *CVG's* reviewer, giving it a 95% rating. *Nintendo Magazine System* called it "a milestone in movie tie-ins which shows just how this type of game should be done", before rendering its 93% verdict. Everyone and their cat loved the brilliant run-and-gun action, so it's no wonder that it was followed up by the equally popular sequels *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* and *Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* in 1994 and 1995 respectively.

"I believe I was one of the first to reproduce the Mode 7 effect on the PC, and we were thinking what game we could use it for," says Sam Nova, then programmer at Danish game company Brain Bug, when discussing the roots of the PC version's development in late 1994. "We showed a demo of the effect to our German distributor Softgold, who loved it. We all were fans of *Super Star Wars* and thought that it would be awesome to bring that game to the PC. Softgold had a close relationship with LucasArts, so they told them about the idea. They not only gave us their thumbs-up but also some of the original assets from the SNES game. In the end we had to redo almost everything from scratch, though, as we couldn't use the graphics, the sound or the game's code on the PC."

The result was that after about a year of work the young team was almost done. All of the levels were in place, painstakingly recreated from the SNES or, in the case of the Death Star trench run, completely redesigned in order to show off the advanced 3D capabilities of the PC – the

THE PC PORTS THAT MADE IT

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

1994, SUN-PROJECT/RAINBOW ARTS

■ *Turrican II* was brought to 1995 PCs by the tiny German development team Sun-Project. Just like with *Super Star Wars* this was not a port but a complete rework, including all-new graphics – done in part by Brain Bug.

EARTHWORM JIM 1&2

1996, RAINBOW ARTS

■ Shiny Entertainment's outstanding comedy platformers made their way from home consoles to the PC as a double-whammy, subtitled *The Whole Can 'O Worms*. Once again, Brain Bug was involved in the game's development.

BLACKHAWK

1994, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

■ Everybody knows Blizzard Entertainment for its *Warcrafts* and its *StarCrafts* and the worlds it tends to play in. But before all of that, the company created *Blackhawk*: a gloomy platformer/shooter in the vein of *Prince Of Persia*.

PRINCESS LEIA! I'M HERE TO RESCUE YOU. I'VE GET YOUR R2-UNIT WITH THE SECRET PLANS OF THE DEATH STAR.
NOW WE MUST DEACTIVATE THE TRACTOR BEAM AND ESCAPE.

» [PC] The story is told through static cutscenes – in which some of the characters make slightly weird faces.

» [PC] Sam's 3D routine, mimicking the SNES's fabled Mode 7, started the development of the PC version – and is, of course, used extensively in the game.

» [PC] The game's level design is as interesting, diverse and challenging as ever – Brain Bug didn't touch the gameplay experience.

narrow cockpit view and choppy animation of the original were replaced by an outside perspective, smooth scrolling and additional obstacles. As with the 1995 PC version of *Turrican II*, every single graphical element was redrawn to take full advantage of the VGA colour palette. The music and sound effects were also reworked in AdLib, MIDI and as WAV files. The only thing the team could not do was add new levels. "We had to stick to the original setup, otherwise we would have gotten into problems with LucasArts," says Sam.

Those problems eventually came from a different direction. The game was in its final stages of development, mere weeks away from release – when everything was just stopped. "There had been a change in management at LucasArts, and the new people in charge had decided that a three-year-old 2D game did not fit in with the direction of their upcoming *Star Wars* games," explains Sam. "We were all shocked by that decision [to stop the game's development, but there was nothing we could do about it."

And that was indeed the end of it: Brain Bug walked away with nothing more than a bruised ego, as Softgold had paid the team to develop the game – but not seeing their hard work end up in the hands of gamers did hurt a lot. The nearly finished version found its way onto the internet in the early Noughties, and runs fine in DOSBox. It does contain a couple of bugs still, which you can avoid by following the debug cheat guide that Sam wrote in the readme file that comes with the package.

It is a shame that this game never got the chance to be enjoyed by a bigger audience: the redesigned graphics are gorgeous (with the exception of some slightly weird faces in the cutscenes), it plays just like the SNES original, while the new trench run level is much more interesting than in the SNES version. But we've one final question: why does it simply say, *Star Wars* on the title screen, and not *Super Star Wars*? Sadly, it's a question even Sam doesn't know the answer to. ✱

"We were all shocked by that decision [to stop the game's development], but there was nothing we could do about it" **Sam Nova**

THE MAKING OF

THE LOST PATROL

JUNE 1965: A US HELICOPTER CRASHES IN THE REMOTE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM LEAVING ONLY SEVEN SURVIVORS. NOW THEY NEED TO FIND THEIR WAY ACROSS 5& MILES OF WILDERNESS THAT'S ALIVE WITH BOOBY TRAPS AND ENEMY SOLDIERS. RETRO GAMER TRACKS DOWN THE STORY BEHIND THE GAME THAT CONFRONTED THE HORRORS OF WAR

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» [Amiga] Your first task is to assign scouts, who'll sweep the surrounding area looking for any problems.

» [Amiga] The dreaded 'pinned down' screen. Get ready to light up the sky.

November 1988: Ian Harling is lost – in thought. He has recently left Bristol-based developer Arcana, where he contributed graphics to Amiga and Atari ST titles, to go it alone as a game designer. All he needs is the perfect setting for his first project, destined to be a recreation of a historic conflict. He begins by looking at the English Civil War before settling on the more contemporary Vietnam War.

"Vietnam hadn't been used as a setting for the kind of title I wanted to do," he tells us. "It also offered a lot of possibilities for subgames. On a deeper level I'd grown up watching the Vietnam War take place, seeing the protests and horrors of it all. It seemed very unjust – but to be honest, it wasn't until I really started researching it that I saw how wrong it was. It didn't need to have happened, and I wanted to make that point through the game, but without forcing it on anyone, using a, 'How do you think this would feel?' approach."

For the actual style of game, Ian was heavily influenced by the Cinemaware titles that mixed movie-like presentation with various gameplay elements. "I bought an Amiga specifically to play Cinemaware's *Defender Of The Crown*. It began a new age for that kind of title and I played it to death, but I thought that it could have been better," says Ian "Not that it was anyone's fault, it was early days for the machine so Cinemaware was having to break new ground."

The Cinemaware games looked amazing at the time, providing a real showcase for the graphical capabilities of the new 16-bit computers. To compete with the likes of *Defender Of The Crown*, Ian set about creating a number of highly detailed images that depicted US soldiers trekking through Vietnam's green inferno. Most were static pictures but some were animated, requiring multiple frames. "They were drawn one pixel at a time on the Amiga's 320x200 pixel screen, which is tiny compared to today's screens, but it still allowed a lot of detail," he says. "The way the Amiga screen worked meant that pixels that were side by side blended automatically with each other, so you needed fewer colours and pixels to make things look smooth. Each static picture took anywhere from three days to a couple of weeks, while animations took perhaps two to three weeks over long – but happy – days. Pictures were sometimes based on several photographs collaged together, others were based on what I thought took place."

"VIETNAM HADN'T BEEN USED AS A SETTING FOR THE KIND OF TITLE I WANTED TO DO"
IAN HARLING

» Ian Harling designed and illustrated *The Lost Patrol*. These days he's a published author and musician.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** SHADOW DEVELOPMENT

» **RELEASED:** 1990

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, PC, ATARI ST

» **GENRE:** ACTION STRATEGY

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE THREE VERSIONS FACE OFF

AMIGA

■ The lead version is the preferred version, featuring the best visuals. As the screenshot comparison shows, the static pictures on the Amiga feature more colours and additional details over the other versions. The original also features Chris Glaister's excellent soundtrack.

ATARI ST

■ The graphics are slightly downgraded compared to the Amiga version, using less colours overall, but they're still impressive. Chris Glaister's music is missing, replaced by a different composition from Ocean's Jonathan Dunn. Otherwise, this is the same game as on the Amiga.

PC

■ Developed by Astros Productions, the graphics are a noticeable step-down from the ST version, even in VGA mode, and the static pictures are slightly smaller. There's no music at all, just the odd sound effect. The drop-down menus have also been replaced by an icon system.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

POWERPLAY: THE GAME OF THE GODS (PICTURED)

RELEASED: 1988

PLATFORM: AMIGA, ATARI ST

THUNDERSTRIKE

RELEASED: 1991

PLATFORM: AMIGA, PC, ATARI ST

ONE STEP BEYOND

RELEASED: 1993

PLATFORM: AMIGA, PC, ATARI ST

» [Amiga] Looks can sometimes be deceiving. Is this lone peasant friend or foe?

THE LONG WALK

WAR IS HELL – 1,000 SQUARE MILES OF HELL

CRASH SITE

■ The chopper comes down in a remote area that's thankfully free from enemy forces, giving you time to plan your strategy and plot your route. Start by selecting two scouts – choose the ones with the highest Morale and Stamina ratings – and then begin your long journey to the east.

TRAILS AND TRACKS

■ While these routes provide the easiest path through the terrain, they're littered with booby traps so avoid them when possible. The trick is to plot a path adjacent to these routes. The going might be slower and tougher, but there's far less chance of triggering traps that will kill your men.

VC ENCAMPMENT

■ These Viet Cong camps can be an excellent source of supplies, but be warned – they're often surrounded by minefields. To access them, you need to approach slowly (select the 'extreme caution' walking speed setting) and then successfully complete the minefield minigame.

VIETNAMESE VILLAGE

■ There are several villages you can visit and with the right approach you can secure food, ammo and information on the enemy's whereabouts. At the first village, make sure you search the area and you'll find a tunnel. Send Gomez in (as he's the smallest) and he'll uncover some supplies.

RIVERS AND SWAMPS

■ Don't automatically avoid areas of water, thinking they'll be impassable. Boats can help you cross rivers, while swamps can be traversed without too much problem (put your men on normal rations to maintain their Stamina and rest regularly). The upside? Enemies are few and far between.

RESCUE POINT

■ This is your destination, the US base at Du Hoc. As you'd expect, the enemy encounters intensify when you're on the home straight. The best tactic is to approach the base in a north-easterly direction, walking as slowly as possible. Congratulations soldier, you made it home.

"THERE WAS ALWAYS A FEELING THAT OCEAN DIDN'T GET THE GAME, AND EVEN CAME TO HATE IT IN THE END"

IAN HARLING

Some of Ian's images are surprisingly lifelike. "I hate to say it but I began drawing before home computers came out, eventually using pointillism to try to create realistic pictures. I never felt entirely happy with inks and paper as a medium, it didn't have the crispness I wanted, so when I started working on computers I felt at home right away. I learned over time that when trying to reproduce a photo or creating something in a realistic style, begin with the smallest detail. If you're drawing a face, start with the eyes and work outwards. Imagine things as a series of shadows. Work from the darkness into the light."

While he was happy arranging pixels on the Amiga, he knew that it needed to be more than a slide show of pretty pictures. The next step was to design the actual game. By now he had hooked up with Simon Cooke, an Amiga coder he'd previously collaborated with, and the pair adopted the name Shadow Development. The chief inspiration for the design was the most primitive form of computer adventure. "At the time text-based adventure games were very popular, and Simon and I were both struck by how atmospheric they could be, despite their simplicity," Ian says. "I'd played games in the preceding years that left me sweating with tension when all that was on the screen were a few words against a black screen. Once you bought into the backstory it was like watching a film unfolding inside your head, and there's nothing so powerful as your own imagination. *The Lost Patrol* traded on that to some extent."

As per the scenario outlined in the introduction, the player has to guide the soldiers from the crash site to the nearest US base which lies many miles to the east, over hills, across rivers and through jungle. You can try to do this quickly, ordering the soldiers to double march with limited rest, taking the most direct route possible, but this will sap morale and worse, you'll likely stumble into traps and enemy ambushes. Or you can be more cautious, ordering scouts to sweep the area, plotting the best course through the terrain and taking regular rests, but this means using more rations and spending more days – and crucially nights – in the enemy's backyard. Whichever tactic you choose, each move you make could be your last. "The player spends perhaps 30 percent of the time watching a small cross traverse the screen," says Ian. "But because you have no idea what will happen next, your own expectations create a lot of tension and give a sense of foreboding that someone might feel if they were actually there.

"Having to observe the attributes of the characters and make sure that you're keeping them fed, rested and in good morale, was again something we knew you'd have to consider if you were in that predicament," continues Ian. "The threat of your own men killing you for bad leadership, as sometimes happened in Vietnam, made sure you paid attention. The interrogation sequences also helped, we hoped. Having to decide if someone was friend or foe added to the uncertainty and realism."

» [Amiga] Keep checking back to the squad screen and act to maintain Stamina and Morale levels.

There are several interrogation scenes which occur when you encounter Vietnamese locals (typically when you enter a village). Here the game regresses to its text adventure foundations, allowing the player to type in questions. Depending on your line of questioning, you may uncover useful supplies or learn about enemy movements, but sometimes actions speak louder than words if you want results. Elsewhere, there are five arcade-style subgames which are triggered seemingly randomly as you trek towards your goal (see Tour Of Duty).

As the game was nearing completion, under the provisional title *The Long Walk*, Ian and Simon started to look for a publisher. "We had the game design and static pictures and animations completed, and a couple of the subgames roughed out," remembers Ian. "We had taken them to a couple of publishers, but everyone at the time wanted more arcade-style titles. Ocean was looking for new ideas and we piqued its interest."

Successfully courting Ocean, the UK's biggest publisher at the time, which was looking to expand its 16-bit output, was surely a coup. But for Ian and Simon it was not a great experience. "Obstructive is the first word that comes to mind," says Ian. "We knew we'd have to get involved

» [Amiga] After every enemy encounter, search the area to retrieve vital supplies.

» [Amiga] Some villages are home to hidden tunnels which may contain food and ammo.

with someone to get the game out there, but there were so many publishers ripping people off in a multitude of ways that we were very wary. We hoped our relationship with Ocean would be good, but over time it placed more restrictions on us, including the number of disks used in the game, and tried to push us towards making an arcade title which took the heart out of what we'd initially hoped to create. I don't think that Ocean grasped what the game style was."

The number of disks was a contentious issue. Ocean limited the game to two disks (three on the later Atari ST and PC versions), to keep costs and duplication time down. Ian believes he needed more like five disks to bring his original vision to life. "Finding out that we wouldn't be able to use more disks halfway through production slowed us down a lot, and meant we had to rethink much of what we intended to be in it. There was always a feeling that Ocean didn't get the game, and even came to hate it in the end, as it didn't fit with its other offerings."

One of the subgames that seems out of place is the hand-to-hand combat, where a member of your squad partakes in pugilism with an enemy soldier. Was this formulaic inclusion down to publisher pressure? "I can't remember whether it was our idea or Ocean's to include it, but it's not something I would have chosen to put in knowing the limitations we were under. It was another thing that suffered due to not having sufficient disks to run it." One idea that definitely was Ocean's was renaming the game *Platoon 2*, to position it as a sequel to its earlier movie tie-in. "The *Platoon 2* title option was Ocean's idea to try and sell it as a semi-arcade game, but luckily it didn't happen," says Ian. "I didn't even play *Platoon*, it wasn't my kind of game."

With the title locked as *The Lost Patrol*, the Amiga version was due to go on sale in time for Christmas 1989. Eleventh hour tweaks meant that it slipped into 1990,

» [Amiga] It's crucial that you rest regularly otherwise exhaustion will take hold of your men.

"WE NEVER SAW SALES FIGURES SO, OTHER THAN REVIEWS, WE WERE IN THE DARK AND THOUGHT IT HAD DIED A DEATH"
IAN HARLING

» [Amiga] Digitised sequences, captured using the Vidi-Amiga frame-grabber device, play as you trek.

TOUR OF DUTY

A GRUNT'S GUIDE TO JUNGLE WARFARE

ENEMY FIREFIGHT

■ You're trapped in a ruined building, pinned down by enemy fire. Don't go gung-ho, this is not *Operation Wolf*. The aim is to not be overrun, so just keep popping up and taking out an enemy soldier or two. Ammo is precious, so preserve as much as you can. If you're getting low, retreat!

SNIPER DUEL

■ There's a lone sniper hiding in one of the buildings. Use your rifle's telescopic sight to pinpoint the enemy, looking for the telltale muzzle flash of the sniper's rifle. When you've identified his location, switch to Bachman, who's the best marksman in your squad, and take him out.

GRENADE BATTLE

■ The enemy opens fire on your location, but they're entrenched in the ground, so you need to use grenades to flush them out. There's a lot of trial and error involved here. Hold down the fire button to power-up your throw, then lob a pineapple in their general direction. Hit them all to win.

» The game's artwork was illustrated by Ocean's go-to guy Bob Wakelin.

» The March 1990 issue of *Zero* magazine featured *The Lost Patrol* as its covergame.

» [PC] The externally-developed PC version features fewer colours and an icon-driven menu system.

» [Atari ST] This is why you should enlist scouts and listen to their advice.

and when it did arrive the reviews were generally positive. Over nine reviews it scored an average of 76%, with the presentation and strategic elements receiving wide acclaim, while the repetition of some of the images and subgames was criticised. Some reviewers praised the game for offering a different perspective compared to typical war games. Writing in *ST Format*, Neil Jackson made a pertinent comment given Ocean's suggested title for the game, "Unlike *Platoon*, which made war seem jolly good fun, *The Lost Patrol* approaches the subject with a certain amount of tact and provides an insight into the fear that must have been felt during the Vietnam War." This approach was always Ian's intention and was emphasised by the clear anti-war message that appears should you manage to complete the game. "We were in two minds as to whether or not we should say what we did at the end," he says, "but after I'd spent so long reading about the war and growing more saddened by what happened to both sides, I felt compelled to use it. People don't make wars, governments do, and it's a tragedy that so many lives were destroyed in the pursuit of little actual gain."

The popularity of *The Lost Patrol* has endured over the years and if anything, its appeal has steadily grown. Recently it has attracted new fans thanks to it being one of the 25 titles bundled with The A500 Mini device. Ian finds this both pleasing and surprising. "Being honest, we didn't know how well-received it was, or that it did endure. We never saw full European sales figures so, other than reviews, we were in the dark and thought it had died a death. It was only in the last ten years or so that we saw people speaking fondly of it online, and it surprised us. I honestly didn't realise that so many had enjoyed it. Chris Glaister's theme tune helped immensely and it deservedly gets a lot of praise."

Chris' bass-heavy soundtrack for the Amiga version does deserve special mention. This main in-game music loops every three minutes but it never feels repetitive. "It was just the right feel, very atmospheric," says Ian. "When we were developing the game I was into Peter Gabriel. I remember phoning Chris and asking if he could do a theme song with a good bass line like a Gabriel track. I half mumbled the kind of thing I wanted, and he said, 'Like this?' and hummed something ten times better than what I had. I laughed and said, 'Yeah that will do it!' What he eventually came up with was even better."

Following the release of *The Lost Patrol*, Ian worked on dozens more games before leaving the industry behind to author books and more recently write music (under the name Perpacity). After all this time, we wondered if he'd ever entertained the idea of a director's cut, or maybe *The Lost Patrol Redux*? "Many times," he admits. "I've always wanted to do the game as it could have been, but everyone involved has now moved on, so I doubt that it will happen. The engine that provided the weighting system behind each move and its effect on individual characters took some time to develop, and we had hoped to use it on further titles. I think we could do better with today's computers, but I still believe in the adventure game ethos and would want to retain that kind of approach. One day..." *

MINEFIELD CROSSING

■ Select one of your less able men and send him into the minefield to clear a path for the rest of the squad. On all fours, turn in a circle and stab the ground to reveal the outline of mines, then carefully crawl forward. Some minefields cover several screens, so you'll need to be patient.

UNARMED COMBAT

■ Your scout may encounter a lone soldier guarding supplies which triggers a one-on-one fight scene. You have three moves – kick, punch and, when close, head-butt. There's little skill to these fights. Just be aggressive and keep hamming the fire button until the enemy keels over.

LOCAL INTERROGATION

■ When quizzing the locals, there are three things you need to ask, "Food?", "Ammo?" and, "Where VC?" If diplomacy fails you'll need to be more direct – however, killing locals to get results will affect your squad's morale, and wiping our entire villages only serves to swell enemy numbers.

Gates Of Zendocon

LOTS OF LEVELS, LOTS OF BOREDOM

» RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI LYNX » 1989 » EPYX

Unlike a lot of my friends who decided to buy Game Boys, I placed my faith in Atari's Lynx. As history has since told us, said faith was badly misplaced, but it's easy to see why the handheld was so appealing for 16-year-old me.

After all, it was immensely powerful for the time and magazines suggested there was a lot of strong developer support for the console. Best of all – for me at least – the console was guaranteed a bunch of Atari arcade games and I was a big fan of Atari games old and new. The thought of playing the likes of *Roadblasters*, *STUN Runner* and *Paperboy* on the move was too good an opportunity to turn down and I ordered the console along with a copy of *Blue Lightning*, *Chip's Challenge* and *Gates Of Zendocon*.

While two of the games were worthwhile purchases, *Gates Of Zendocon* was massively disappointing. Despite having an outrageous amount of levels and some neat mechanics like losing weapons as you get hit, the ability to use different gates in a level to access different stages and the option to leave your damaged ship between levels for a new one, it just never grabbed me.

Part of this was the visuals which were a little too gaudy and eye-searing, despite often showcasing tremendously big sprites and some spectacular-looking explosions. Mainly though it was down to *Gates Of Zendocon*'s weak sound design and the languid pace of your ship.

Your craft moves through space like an ant moving through treacle and it makes avoiding bullets and enemies needlessly hard. Projectiles from enemies are fast, adding to the difficulty, and while your laser is pretty powerful, it can still take many hits to destroy certain enemies.

Sure my Lynx had colour graphics and could be rotated through 90 degrees, but my friend Paul had access to shmups like *R-Type* and *Nemesis* on his trusty Game Boy. Game Boy 1, Lynx 0.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

TINY TOON Adventures

BUSTER'S HIDDEN TREASURE

BAT

BUSTER BUNNY

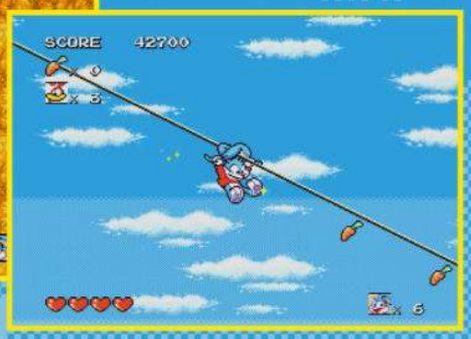
DURING THE NINETIES, IT SEEMED LIKE EVERY CUTE CHARACTER HOPPED INTO A PLATFORM GAME. POPULAR CARTOONS PROVIDED A RICH SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR DEVELOPERS LOOKING TO LEAP ONTO THE NEXT BIG THING AND IN 1993, THE TINY TOONS SPRANG INTO ACTION WITH AN EXCELLENT MEGA DRIVE PLATFORMER

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON

GOGO DODO

» [Mega Drive] Stop moving and Buster becomes so bored that he falls asleep.

» [Mega Drive] Buster takes some damage from a snapping crocodile in the lake area.



***Tiny Toon Adventures* was a Warner Bros cartoon that started in 1990 and ran for several seasons.** During its run, Konami held the licence to make games based on the series and one of its better offerings was *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure* for Sega's Mega Drive. Many of the enemies, locations and additional characters are based on actual episodes or scenes from the series and there are several Easter eggs for fans of the cartoon to spot.

The story surrounds the search for secret treasure described on an old map discovered while the Toons are cleaning ACME University. The show's villain, Max Montana, steals the map and hunts the treasure for himself. Buster decides to go after Max and heads to the strange island. In the meantime, Max has also kidnapped Buster's friends and uses mind control to turn them into his henchmen. To round out the classic platforming story, once Buster rescues each friend and takes the treasure for himself Max kidnaps Buster's girlfriend Babs Bunny. He then holds her ransom which sets up the final showdown in his lair.

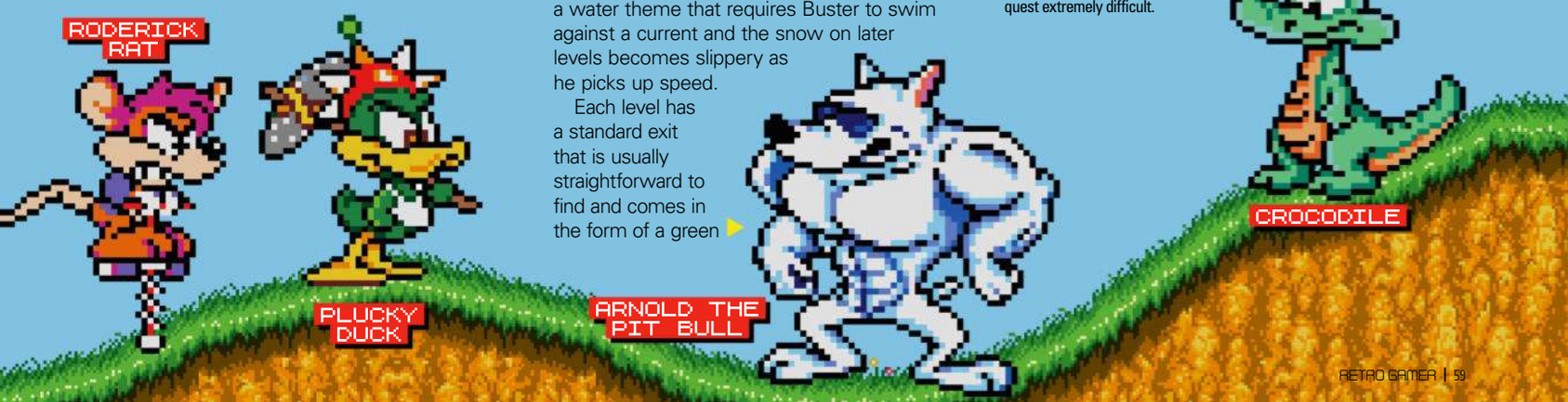
Buster navigates the treasure island via a world map with stars representing each stage. He starts on a beach, then heads into a woodland before entering a volcano. Towards the end, players visit a pirate ship, a snow-topped mountain and Max's industrial factory. There are 39 stages in total including eight boss battles, six secret stages and six bonus rounds. To finish the game, only the main 27 stages and boss battles need to be beaten. However, there are many extra lives to be found in the secret stages and bonus rounds that are needed for the difficult final stage where extra continues can no longer be used.

The overall gameplay is what any gamer familiar with Nineties platformers would expect. Enemies come in several shapes and sizes with each one requiring a single hit to defeat. Some fly in the air, others throw projectiles, but all take one hit point from Buster's life gauge on contact. Smaller spikes and lava pits also deal one damage to Buster, while the larger spike pits cause instant death. Most stages have moving platforms, springs and conveyor belts in some form or another. Some of the stages have a water theme that requires Buster to swim against a current and the snow on later levels becomes slippery as he picks up speed.

Each level has a standard exit that is usually straightforward to find and comes in the form of a green

"ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS ARE BASED ON ACTUAL EPISODES OR SCENES AND THERE ARE SEVERAL EASTER EGGS FOR FANS OF THE CARTOON TO SPOT"

» [Mega Drive] Many dangers like these falling spikes make Buster's quest extremely difficult.



» [Mega Drive] Dr Gene Splicer has taken control of Buster's friends. Defeat Splicer to save your pals.

"THE BATTLES WITH BUSTER'S FRIENDS FEATURE DR GENE SPLICER WHO HAS TEAMED UP WITH MAX MONTANA TO USE MIND CONTROL ON THEM"

» [Mega Drive] The map screen shows completed stages and gives clues to secret areas.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

ADVENTURING WITH THE TINY TOONS ON OTHER PLATFORMS

TINY TOON ADVENTURES

■ The first *Tiny Toon* videogame to be released, this traditional platforming romp gives players control of Buster and three other characters as they try to rescue Babs from Max Montana. This is an accomplished title and was well-received by critics on its release.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BABS' BIG BREAK

■ Babs Bunny is looking to become a star but Max Montana is thwarting her career. Controlling different characters from the cartoon, including Plucky Duck and Hamton J Pig, this fun platformer was the first handheld game in the series. Collecting gems grants access to some enjoyable minigames.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES 2: TROUBLE IN WACKYLAND

■ Set across five different amusement park rides, each level has a different gameplay mechanic and features a different *Tiny Toon* character. Collecting tickets grants access to the different rides and players eventually collect enough for the final showdown with Max Montana in a trap-filled funhouse.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER BUSTS LOOSE

■ Featuring large, bold sprites and an excellent soundtrack, this SNES platformer has lots of variety in its level design and several different endings depending on the difficulty selected. It's highly regarded as a platforming great and regularly finds itself in top 100 SNES games lists.

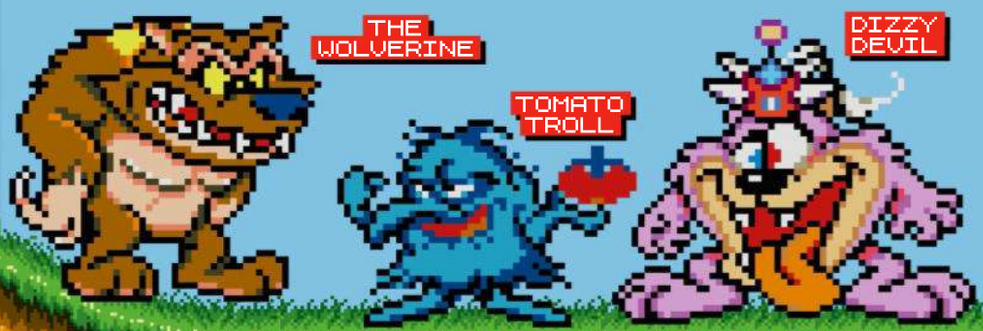
TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER'S BAD DREAM

■ Released long after the show had finished and developed by Treasure, this GBA title has more in common with a side-scrolling brawler than a platformer. Buster teams up with other characters from the series to take on various enemies as he battles through his nightmares. It's well worth a play.

dodo character called Gogo Dodo. The six secret stages are hidden and require exploration or tricky platforming to find. When a secret exit is found, the map will update and join the path accordingly. Finding one of the six bonus round entrances grants a one-time chance to visit WackyLand. In these bizarre worlds, Buster can fill up his life counter but will exit the stage if he touches one of the Gogo Dodos.

Throughout the game, Buster finds items to aid him in his journey. His main resource is carrots which add one use of the special attack for each 50 collected. Buster starts with three hit points and collecting heart pieces replenishes the counter. Finding a bell refills all his hit points as well as adding an extra heart piece for a maximum of five hit points. Dying resets the meter back to three and finishing a stage refills all your hit points. Occasionally Buster stumbles across a crystal that grants temporary invincibility that enables him to rush through areas crowded with enemies. Other items include rare extra-life pieces and special attack pick-ups. Many of these items are found in hidden areas such as false walls and hard-to-reach treetops that require some tricky platforming to reach.

Buster has several moves to pull off, firstly, his basic jump is used to traverse platforms and land on enemy heads to kill them. To get a small boost to the jump, and make sure he clears longer distances, Buster can take a short run-up. To create a Super Jump, Buster needs to pick up speed on straights before launching himself a large distance across the stage. This technique can also be used to create a slide move by pressing down instead of jumping. The slide move can take out enemies and help Buster squeeze through tight spots quickly. Buster can also crouch and crawl to navigate narrow spaces as well as drop a platform by holding down and pressing jump. Buster's final move is tricky to pull off but becomes vital as the game



BOSS RUSH

BUNNY BUSTING THOSE BRAINWASHED BOSSES

DIZZY DEVIL

Buster's first boss encounter is with Dr Gene Splicer who has brainwashed Dizzy Devil. He whizzes around the screen as Splicer leaps from branch to branch.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This one is easy, just focus on avoiding Dizzy Devil by jumping around the branches. When Buster is near Splicer, bounce on his head.

CALAMITY COYOTE

Set in a river with a huge wheel of platforms, Splicer commands Calamity Coyote to chuck apples at you while he randomly pokes his head up.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Try to keep to the right to make avoiding the apples much easier. Then you can time Buster's jumps to coincide with Splicer as he pops his head up.

PLUCKY DUCK

Plucky Duck keeps slamming the ground causing stalactites to fall from above. Dr Splicer has also taken to the skies in his mini aeroplane.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This one is tricky if Buster stops moving. Focus on avoiding Plucky Duck's hammer and falling stalactites while taking any opportunity to jump on Splicer's exposed head.

TOXIC REVENGER

Plucky Duck's alter ego Toxic Revenger is the next character you face. Splicer flies around on a platform fuelled by lava eruptions, that aim for Buster.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Speed is crucial in this tough boss fight. Avoid Toxic Revenger's attacks and jump upwards so Splicer chases Buster. You can then aim for his head.

MAX MONTANA

The first encounter with Max Montana is a battle to recover the coveted treasure. He sends water jets up from the floor that destroys the ground underneath.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Keep jumping around and be ready to aim for Max's head before he rises upwards. Avoid any holes that have appeared on the floor.

HAMTON J PIG

Splicer is back in his aeroplane and controlling Hamton J Pig who is using a powerful vacuum cleaner to drag poor Buster about the screen.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Keep holding to the left and jump constantly on the platform at the top of the screen. Time each jump correctly to land on Splicer's head and you'll soon get the better of him.

ELMYRA DUFF

It's every bunny's worst nightmare! Elymra chases Buster through the factory and will cuddle and smooch him to death if she gets her mitts on him. Run, Buster! Run!

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

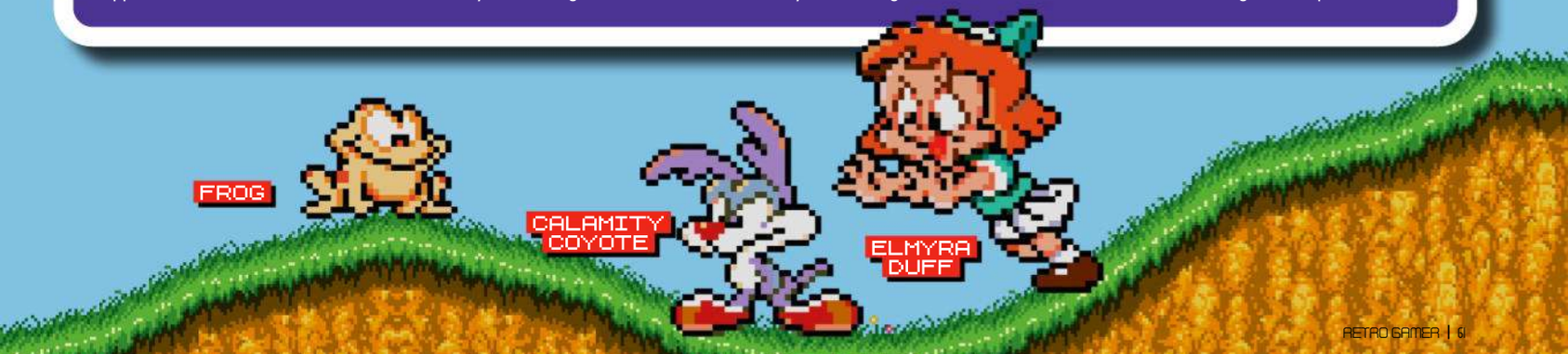
Keep running to the right and time jumps to avoid obstacles. Look out for tight spaces and jump back over Elymra if she gets too close.

MAX MONTANA

The final showdown with Max Montana has two phases. Phase one he fires lasers from his giant mech before stomping and rushing Buster in phase two.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Use wall jumps to gain height to land on Max's head. Phase one is simply avoiding lasers. Use accurate jumps to avoid his rushing move in phase two.



LOCATION, LOCATION

THE DIFFERENT STAGES BUSTER VISITS WHILE HUNTING FOR TREASURE

THE PLAINS

■ The perfect start to any bunny adventure, this a leisurely stroll through grasslands filled with carrots. This level is filled with easy platform sections and slower enemies. There are plenty of secret passages and hidden rooms for inquisitive bunnies to discover in the level's underground sections.

FUNGUSAMUNGUS FOREST

■ Bunnies aren't used to climbing trees but Buster uses all his bouncing skills to explore the branches and canopy of this critter-plagued forest. Some of the levels have maze sections that require Buster to traverse tall tree trunks and tricky platforms.

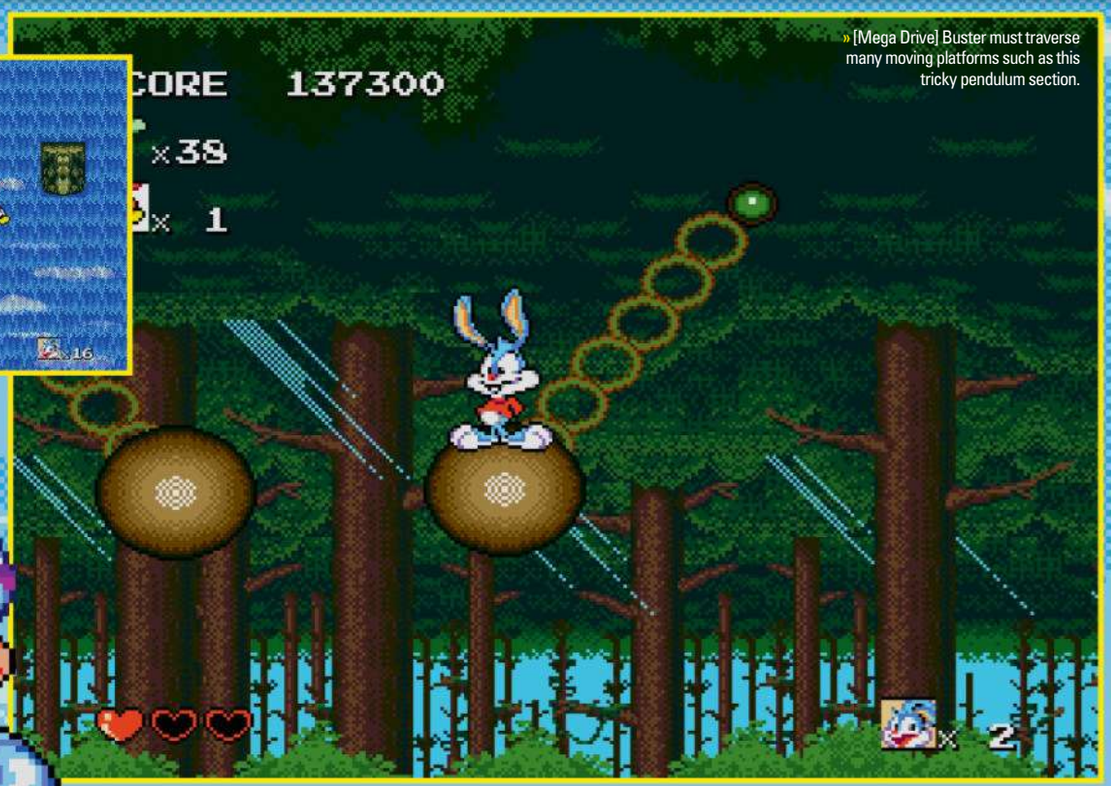
DEEPDARK CAVERNS

■ It's eerie in the caverns and there isn't room to hop around but Buster can use his crawl move to squeeze through the small spaces. Exploring the corners of the caverns reveals many secrets but the route is dangerous with spikes appearing from all directions.

UNDERGROUND SEA

■ Bunnies and water don't mix but Buster flaps his feet and ears to swim through the various rivers, lakes and waterfalls in this damp level. Be careful of the sharks and crocodiles that snap at Buster and the strong currents that sweep him into spike pits.

» [Mega Drive] Collecting helper tokens gives Buster the chance to clear the game's on-screen enemies.



» [Mega Drive] Buster must traverse many moving platforms such as this tricky pendulum section.

"TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER'S HIDDEN TREASURE IS A QUALITY TITLE THAT FOUND ITSELF VYING FOR ATTENTION AMONGST A SEA OF PLATFORMERS APPEARING AT THE TIME"

LAVA CAVE

■ No bunny wants their fur burnt but Buster bravely hops and bounces across the hot lava pits as he ventures deeper into the mountain. Fire enemies and lava eruptions are everywhere here. The key is to keep moving if you want to get out of this one alive.

SHIPWRECK

■ Buster heads to the sea and finds himself swashbuckling through ghosts and pirates. Like every good pirate ship, this is where the treasure can be found and a showdown with Max Montana is all that stands between Buster and riches beyond his wildest bunny dreams.

RADAR RANGE

■ Thank goodness for his fur or Buster would freeze on the mountain. These slippery platforms are tricky to control and spikes are everywhere. Watch out for Gotcha Gradmore who rushes at Buster and be sure to quickly jump on Arnold The Pit Bull before he bowls his ball.

EXCAVATION FACTORY

■ Buster finally reaches Max Montana's factory. At this moment there are no more continues and Buster must rely on any lives he has left. Robots attack from every direction and platforms constantly move. Taking time to plan each section is critical so you don't run out of lives.

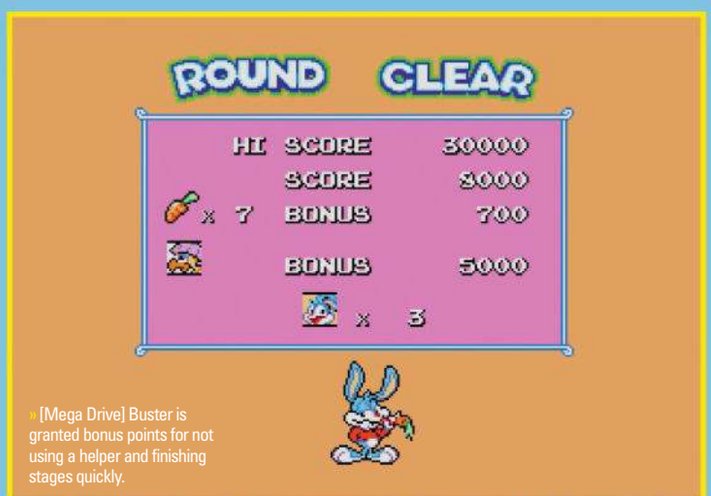
progresses. Jumping into a wall creates a moment to spring off and perform a wall jump. This grants access to hard-to-reach places and is also a handy way to defeat flying enemies.

During his adventure, Buster enlists the help of a few other friends who support him. The characters that help Buster act as one-time special attacks that clear all the enemies from the screen. They are unlocked by finding pick-ups in the game or collecting 50 carrots and can be used at any time to get Buster out of a tight spot. Once activated the action freezes and a fun animation plays out as all the enemies are destroyed. There are three types of these special moves, Li'l Sneezer who floats down on a balloon and sneezes, Concord Condor who drops a large weight that shakes the screen, and Little Beeper who zooms across the screen creating a wind blast.

Every few levels, Buster will come up against a boss. The battles with Buster's friends feature Dr Gene Splicer who has teamed up with Max Montana to use mind control on them. Each of these battles requires Buster to jump on Splicer's head several times while avoiding the attacks from his friend. Once Splicer is taken down, Buster rescues his friend who thanks him and usually apologises for attacking him. In between these fights, Buster has a battle with Max Montana himself on the aforementioned pirate ship and takes the treasure back. This is also where Buster learns that Max has Babs Bunny held captive. The last two boss battles occur one after the other with the first being a race to avoid Elymra Duff, who wants to take Buster as a cute pet, before the final showdown with Max Montana.

***Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure* is a quality title that found itself vying for attention amongst a sea of platformers appearing at the time.** It has some unique ideas and is a genuinely tough challenge, especially in the last few stages. Sadly, it's rarely discussed today, despite receiving overwhelmingly positive reviews from the gaming press, with most posting scores over 90%. Many reviewers pointed out the tight controls, polished visuals and variety in the level design. Today, it's quite often unfairly classed as a *Sonic The Hedgehog* clone. The only real similarities are the springs, Buster's running animation and how the opening stages resemble *Sonic*'s Green Hill Zone. It's more accurate to consider this an accomplished rival or a genuine alternative to *Sonic* on the Mega Drive. *Buster's Hidden Treasure* stands out on its own merits and deserves to be seen with fresh eyes as a classic Nineties platformer.

» [Mega Drive] WackyLand is the place to visit to stock up on lives and helper tokens.



» [Mega Drive] Buster is granted bonus points for not using a helper and finishing stages quickly.

Super A'Can

» **MANUFACTURER:** Funtech » **YEAR:** 1995
» **COST:** $299 (launch), £320+ (today, boxed), £160+ (today, unboxed)

If you wanted to design a competitor to the Mega Drive and SNES, you'd probably want to give it a high colour palette, the ability to scale and rotate sprites, and a fast CPU that developers were familiar with. The option for expansions down the line would be useful, and a SNES-style controller could hardly hurt. Funtech's Super A'Can offered all of those things to Taiwanese gamers, and did so in a grey plastic casing that clearly took some inspiration from the design of the SNES.

Unfortunately, Funtech decided to release the Super A'Can at a time when players were far more interested in the new 32-bit CD-ROM consoles with 3D games than 16-bit cartridge machines. The result was that the Super A'Can quickly became a resounding flop, which was discontinued after just six months on the market. Combine that with the very limited market for the system in the first place, and you've got a seriously rare machine that fetches extremely high prices – especially since emulation of the system has not advanced very far. *

ESSENTIAL GAME

Boom Zoo

We like playing *Bomberman*. We also like giant pandas, because it's fun to watch them tumbling around on YouTube. Can you imagine if we had a way to combine those interests? Thanks to *Boom Zoo*, you can. It's basically *Bomberman* but with animals, and we always choose the panda because we like pandas. Now, can you imagine if we had a way to combine those interests in a way that cost less than a holiday in Taipei? That's where the appeal of the Super A'Can falls down for regular collectors.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Super A'Can fact

■ Just 12 games are known to have been released for the Super A'Can, all of which are expensive. The rarest game, an RPG by the name *Rebel*, sold for over £4,500 in September 2023.

PROCESSORS: 16-BIT MOTOROLA 68000 (10.7 MHZ)

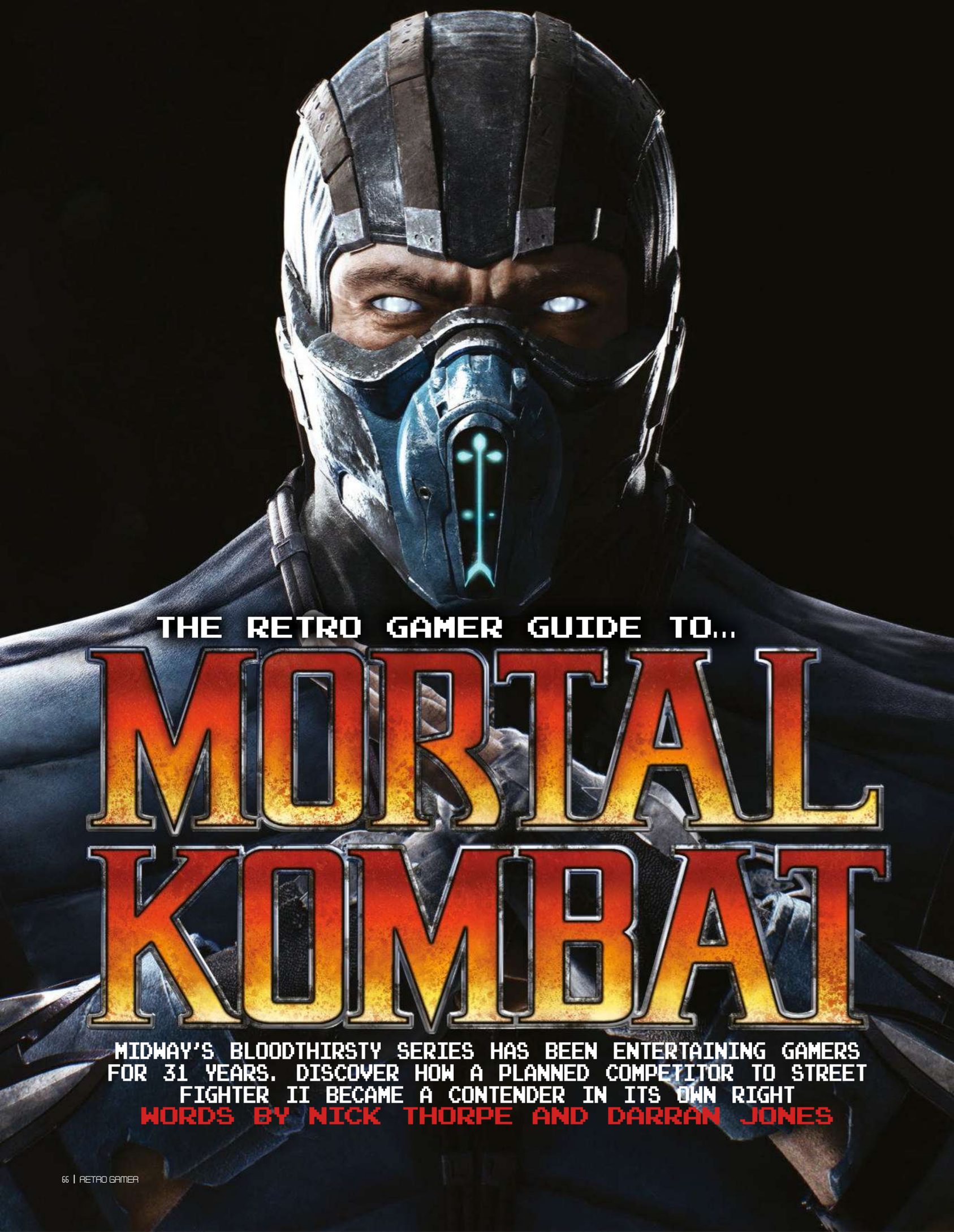
GRAPHICS: UMC UM6618 (320X240 RESOLUTION, 256 COLOURS ON SCREEN FROM A 32,768 COLOUR PALETTE, SUPPORTS SPRITE SCALING, ROTATION AND MOSAIC)

MEDIA: NINTENDO DS GAME CARD (UP TO 512MB)

AUDIO: 16 STEREO PCM/ADPCM CHANNELS

STORAGE: CARTRIDGE (UP TO 112 MEGABIT)

RAM: 256KB

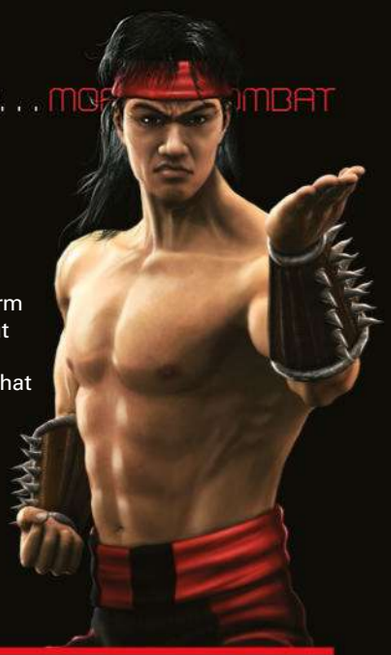


THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO...

MORTAL KOMBAT

MIDWAY'S BLOODTHIRSTY SERIES HAS BEEN ENTERTAINING GAMERS FOR 31 YEARS. DISCOVER HOW A PLANNED COMPETITOR TO STREET FIGHTER II BECAME A CONTENDER IN ITS OWN RIGHT

WORDS BY NICK THORPE AND DARRAN JONES



***Mortal Kombat* is quite an interesting franchise as it's one that has generally improved with each successive main instalment.** Yes there have been some huge stumbles along the way (most of the spin-offs, for example, are absolute garbage) but the core games have tended to always improve on the original game's appeal, which was gore, gore and even more gore.

Created by Ed Boon and John Tobias as a competitor to Capcom's phenomenally successful *Street Fighter II*, Midway's brawler mainly relied on two things to wow gamers in the arcades: its realistic digitised characters; and an unhealthy amount of over-the-top blood and guts that immediately made it stand apart from virtually every other game of the time. Sure the animation was incredibly ropey and naff in the first game, and the block button was a pain in the arse to get used to, but the imaginative setting, stylised characters and the ability to perform insane Fatality moves, that ranged from ripping out your hapless foe's heart to stripping them of their spines, ensured there was no shortage of players that wanted to tackle Midway's game.

Its success saw Midway continue to expand the series with additional games that would add new characters, even more outlandish finishing moves and even spin off into new genres (admittedly with very little success). It even moved into other entertainment areas in the form of films and comics. So join us as we look at the highs and lows of the bloody popular series.

MORTAL KOMBAT 1992

ARCADE, VARIOUS

The original *Mortal Kombat* caused a massive stir upon its release, ushering in awareness of just how graphically capable videogames were becoming, and proved that you didn't need to have amazing game mechanics in order to be popular.

Up against *Street Fighter II*, *Mortal Kombat* was clearly the inferior game, but gamers didn't seem to care. Unlike many fighters of the time, Midway's game featured a block button that instantly made you rethink how you approached matches. Its character roster was interesting too, featuring everything from a Hollywood movie star (Johnny Cage) to a trio of deadly ninjas (Sub-Zero, Scorpion and secret character Reptile) and the God Of Lightning (Raiden). Each character in the game was portrayed by a real-life actor, using Midway's state-of-the-art digitising techniques. There was even a half-decent story at the heart of all the fighting that explained how all the fighters were competing in a deadly tournament in the hope of overthrowing the evil sorcerer Shang Tsung and his four-armed protector Goro. Perhaps the biggest draw of Midway's game, though, was the insane amount of blood and guts it featured, the most important of which were its Fatalities, which were available upon winning your second bout against your opponent. Your helpless foe would stagger for a few seconds allowing you to hopefully pull off an insanely devastating attack move that would instantly kill them.

The controversy surrounding the likes of *Mortal Kombat*, *Night Trap* and *Lethal Enforcers* (all of which featured digitised human characters) was so great that it led to the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) being formed. Ratings started to appear on the boxes of games, so consumers knew whether they would be suitable for their children to play or not. Hugely successful in arcades, *Mortal Kombat* found similar success in the home market, particularly on the Mega Drive and SNES. Nintendo's strict rules at the time meant that the blood on the SNES version was replaced with less controversial sweat, giving Sega's console a much-needed boost over its competitor.

MORTAL KOMBAT II 1993

ARCADE, VARIOUS

Midway's sequel was a massive improvement over the original, offering better fighting mechanics, a larger roster of characters and all sorts of new finishing moves, ranging from Babalities (which turned your opponent into a baby) to Friendships (a non-malicious finish, such as presenting your defeated foe with a cake).

The moveset of each character was greatly improved making it a far more expansive game that featured a lot more strategy than its predecessor. Five new playable characters were also introduced, offering a starting line-up of 12 fighters. Kitana and Mileena were twin sisters and deadly ninjas, Baraka was a fearsome fighter that fought with deadly blades, Jackson 'Jax' Briggs was a Special Forces officer who was attempting to rescue Sonya Blade, while Kung Lao was a Shaolin monk whose hat could literally split opponents in half. Reptile was now immediately available, and Shang Tsung joined the cast as well (in addition to serving as a sub-boss) to Kintaro, a four-armed Goro replacement and Shao Kahn, the evil Emperor of Outworld. Additionally, hidden characters appeared in the form of Jade (a green-clad female ninja), Noob Saibot (a dark, smoky ninja) and Smoke (a grey-clad ninja), providing that you could work out how to unlock them.

Filled with an insane amount of secrets, including the now infamous "Toasty", *Mortal Kombat II* was another commercial and critical success, with the home conversions being equally popular. Unlike the original *Mortal Kombat*, the SNES version had none of the gore removed, and many consider it to be the definitive home version.

MORTAL KOMBAT 3 1995

ARCADE, VARIOUS

Mortal Kombat 3 continued to define the gameplay mechanics that would lead to it becoming just as competitive a series as *Street Fighter*. Characters were now able to run, a mechanic that quickly solved the problem of the heavily defensive play that had featured predominantly in the earlier games, while new chain combos were also possible. A Run Meter was also introduced, adding to the game's strategy. Realising that it needed to appeal to as many types of players as possible, *Mortal Kombat 3* also added different skill levels, while Kombat Kodes were a new unlockable system that could be entered before two-player matches to modify the gameplay or allow the player to fight hidden characters. The Fatalities from the earlier games had been massively upgraded and were even more ridiculous, while Mercy and Animality moves were introduced (the latter of which would turn opponents into animals when successfully performed).

The graphics were greatly refined compared to the earlier games and many of the backgrounds were now pre-rendered using 3D graphics. The whole styling too was far more contemporary and Western-based than the earlier games, thanks to backdrops like churches and highways, and it was possible to knock characters through the roofs of certain levels, leading to new locations to fight in. Seven new characters were introduced, while a number of characters' looks changed due to being portrayed by new actors (the original actors left due to pay disputes over royalties).

Just over a year after *Mortal Kombat 3* made its arcade debut, Midway released *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, which added many of the popular characters from *Mortal Kombat II* that had been missing in the original game, as well as new levels, tweaked gameplay and a brand-new eight-player Tournament mode. Both versions of *Mortal Kombat 3* were ported to home systems with various degrees of success.

MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY 1996

VARIOUS

It's best to consider *Trilogy* as the ultimate remix for the home consoles that were available at the time. While it featured much of the same gameplay as *Mortal Kombat 3* it also added all the missing characters from the other arcade games, including *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*. Two new secret characters were available, while many of the existing characters had brand-new specials and finishing moves. New mechanics appeared in the form of the Aggressor Bar (which would let a character move faster and hit harder for a certain amount of time) and a Brutality, which caused your opponent to explode if you could pull off an 11-button combo in time.

MORTAL KOMBAT 4 1997

ARCADE, VARIOUS

Mortal Kombat 4 would be the last time that the popular series would make its debut in the arcades. It's notable for many other reasons, though. It's the first game in the series to be in full 3D and the first to feature Fatalities being played from different camera angles. Eight new characters were introduced to the series, including Shinnok (who would double up as the game's final boss) as well as ten returning characters, including Johnny Cage, Liu Kang, Sub-Zero and Scorpion.

Each character was also able to activate a weapon and it was possible to pick up an opponent's weapon and use it against them. *Mortal Kombat 4* also introduced a Maximum Damage cap which prevented players from performing annoying infinite combos. The home-console versions (with the exception of the Game Boy Color release) were well-received at the time, but the later *Mortal Kombat Gold*, an enhanced version for Sega's new Dreamcast console, performed poorly and was largely slammed by critics.

MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO 1997

PLAYSTATION, N64

Every big franchise eventually expands its core fanbase in an attempt to take the series in new and exciting directions. Sometimes the result is *Super Mario Kart*, other times it's a steaming fresh pile of excrement like *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*.

Conceptually, the idea behind *Mythologies* was a sound one: take a beloved character from the earlier games, use a similar combat engine to the one found in the popular arcade games, but place the action in scrolling levels where there is the ability to gain experience points that will power-up your hero's special moves. It was a great idea, but the execution of *Mythologies* was absolutely terrible.

Combat was laughably simplistic, the enemies you fought offer very little challenge, while the level design throughout was incredibly lacklustre. The plot was relatively interesting, being set before the original arcade game, but it's certainly not of a high enough standard that you'll want to complete the game to see how it ends. We're sure we remember reading about other planned games in the *Mythologies* series, but the poor reception of Sub-Zero's first and only standalone game killed any other releases. Still, at least we've been paid to revisit it.

MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORCES 2000

PLAYSTATION

There's a reason *Special Forces* has a pathetic score of 28% on Metacritic. In fact there are many reasons, but we don't have the space, the time, or the inclination, to bother listing them all. This PlayStation exclusive was another misguided attempt by *Mortal Kombat* co-creator John Tobias to take the popular series in new directions. Unfortunately, it's another miserable stab at an adventure platformer that completely misses what made the franchise so popular in the first place.

Credit to Tobias for wanting to do something a little different, but we're wondering what made him think that creating an entire game around Jax, one of the franchise's least popular characters could win over fans. Like many 3D games of the time, *Special Forces* suffered from an abominable camera that does its best to make your fights as frustrating as possible. *Special Forces* was originally earmarked for the N64 and Dreamcast, but both games were cancelled. Bullet dodged we say.

MORTAL KOMBAT ADVANCE 2001

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Talented developers such as Crawfish proved it was entirely possible to port button-heavy fighters like *Street Fighter Alpha 3* over to Nintendo's portable handheld with very little loss in playability. Unfortunately for *Mortal Kombat* fans, it was Virtucraft that was behind *Mortal Kombat Advance* and it made a right pig's ear of it.

Despite the title there's nothing advanced about *Mortal Kombat Advance*. In fact, it's not even a new game, being a rather atrocious port of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*. While it featured the same character roster as its 16-bit counterparts, every other aspect of the game had been compromised in some way. Various stages were completely missing, Stage Fatalities were nowhere to be seen, while virtually every character only had one Fatality move. The gore had been notably toned down in this instalment, while the GBA's lack of buttons meant that not all standard moves were available. While these omissions were understandable, the complete lack of timing of many of the game's moves, as well as its insane difficulty level wasn't. It is utter garbage and a completely forgettable game.

MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE 2002

VARIOUS

After a couple of failed spin-offs in the form of *Mythologies* and *Special Forces*, Midway Games got its killer franchise back on track with Ed Boon's impressive *Deadly Alliance*.

Unlike earlier versions of *Mortal Kombat*, *Deadly Alliance* gave each character three individual fighting styles, one of which was weapon-based. Each style was vastly different to each other and could be switched between at the press of a button. Special moves were dialled back, so that the fighting styles played a bigger part in your fighter's success, while many levels contained obstacles that could be used to damage your opponent. Each character only had one Fatality, but they're all incredibly gory and not too difficult to pull off.

Best of all, though, was the introduction of Konquest Mode, which not only acted as a tutorial for each of the 24 characters (including 11 new brawlers) but also expanded the franchise's storyline. Each character's back story was revealed through a series of missions that earned the player Koins that can be spent in the Krypt, a tomb of 676 Koffins that were filled with numerous secrets and decent unlockables.

MORTAL KOMBAT: TOURNAMENT EDITION 2003

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Realising that the Game Boy Advance was never going to be able to create an accurate version of *Deadly Alliance*, Midway split it across two games, with *Tournament Edition* being a US exclusive. It effectively featured the other half of the character roster that was absent from the original GBA *Deadly Alliance* game, as well as new story enhancements that added Sareena, Sektor and Noob Saibot to the core story. Only Scorpion, Shang Tsung and Quan Chi appeared in both handheld ports. The GBA's button configuration still compromised the gameplay somewhat and each character only had two fighting styles, but it was a marked improvement on *Mortal Kombat Advance*.

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION 2004

VARIOUS

Deception continued to build on the successful mechanics of *Deadly Alliance*, whilst also adding fresh new ideas. There were now traps that could instantly kill characters if they were knocked into them, two new minigames appeared, one a variation of chess, the other a puzzle game that played like Capcom's *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, and characters now had two Fatality moves, a well as a brand-new Suicide move. Konquest Mode remained, but now focussed on a single character, Shujinko. The Krypt also returned and nine new characters were introduced. A new version of *Deception* called *Mortal Kombat: Unchained* was released on PSP in 2006.

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS 2005

PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Overseen by series co-creator Ed Boon, *Shaolin Monks* is easily the most successful spin-off in the *Mortal Kombat* series, selling over 1 million units. It's effectively a slick cross between a scrolling fighter and an adventure game, with the occasional bit of platforming thrown in for good measure. Designed for co-op play, players guided Liu Kang and Kung Lao through a surprisingly good story that incorporated all the usual *Mortal Kombat* mythology and tropes. The new multi-directional combat engine enabled the player to effortlessly see off large numbers of attackers, while experience points gained from kills powered up special moves in a similar way to *Mythologies*. New to the series were Multalities which enabled the player to perform Fatalities on a large number of enemies at once.

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON 2006

PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, WII

The character roster of *Armageddon* was absolutely staggering, with 62 available characters (or 63, if you had the Wii version of the game that included Khameleon). Despite the large number of available characters, only two, Taven and Daegon, were brand-new to the series. In addition to the large roster, players could also create their own customisable characters, as well as customisable Fatalities. Konquest Mode returned and utilised numerous mechanics from *Shaolin Monks*, while a *Mario Kart*-styled racer called *Motor Kombat* was also included. The only downgrade is that most characters only had access to two fighting styles.

MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE 2008

VARIOUS

This entertaining crossover turned out to be the last product that Midway Games made before it filed for bankruptcy. It's an excellent swansong for the company to go out on, even if it did have to tone down some aspects of the popular series to appease Warner Bros. Eager to secure a teen rating for the game, Warner Bros insisted that the trademarked gory Fatalities of the series were softened. Despite this, the Fatalities of the Joker, Deathstroke and Kitana were still censored in the US release of the game.

The actual character roster reads like a greatest hits of both franchises, with the likes of Liu Kang, Scorpion, Sub-Zero and Raiden representing *Mortal Kombat*, while Batman, the Joker, Superman and Wonder Woman battle on behalf of DC. The available story mode played out from the viewpoints of both universes and gave every character a chance to shine. It was extremely well written and created the template for future *Mortal Kombat* games as well as the later *Injustice* series. The actual story was created by comic writers Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti, which goes someway to explaining its high quality.

New mechanics introduced included Rage Mode, which allowed characters to break an opponent's guard, increased attack damage and made the character resistant to stun effects, and Klose Kombat, where the characters locked together for some close-quarter fighting. The *Kollector's Edition* of the game was notable for a 16-page comic that featured illustrations by *Mortal Kombat* co-creator, John Tobias.

MORTAL KOMBAT 2011

VARIOUS

Mortal Kombat was the first game from Ed Boon's newly formed NetherRealm Studios and is effectively a reboot of the franchise. Created with the aim to be considered as a competitive fighter, it featured far more strategy than earlier games thanks to the addition of the Super Meter, which could be charged to three distinct levels of power. The first level created an enhanced version of an existing special attack, while the second let players break combos. The final level allowed players to pull off a devastating X-Ray Move which caused massive damage and revealed an X-Ray of characters' bones and organs being ruptured or shattered. Other notable inclusions were a brand-new Challenge Tower, tag-team fighting and a solid online mode which introduced a King Of The Hill variant for up to eight players. While it only added one new character, Skarlet, it did introduce guest characters in the form of Kratos and Freddy Krueger. *Mortal Kombat: Komplete Edition* later included all the DLC.

MORTAL KOMBAT X 2015

PLAYSTATION 4, PC, XBOX ONE

This *Mortal Kombat* game is generally considered to be the best in the series. It ramps up the over-the-top X-Ray Moves and introduces nine new characters, including Cassie Cage, D'Vorah, Kotal Kahn and Jacqui Briggs. Downloadable guest characters were also available in the form of Leatherface, Jason Voorhees, Predator and the Xenomorph Alien. As with NetherRealm's earlier fighter, *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, characters could interact with certain parts of each stage, allowing them to avoid or massively damage their opponent. New finishing moves were also introduced, Quitalities, which punished players who dropped out of online games, and Faction Kills, which were specific to the five factions that players could join. The 2016 update, *Mortal Kombat XL*, included all the additional DLC.

MORTAL KOMBAT 11 2019

VARIOUS

The past comes back to haunt *Mortal Kombat*'s cast in this time-twisting tale, as Kronika seeks to rewrite history along with her minions, newcomers Cetrion and Geras. The Kollector is the only other new face, though the Joker, Spawn, the Terminator, Robocop and John Rambo all joined the roster as DLC guests. The biggest gameplay change was the replacement of X-Ray Moves with Fatal Blow attacks – highly damaging moves that can only be used once per match, and only at low health. *Mortal Kombat 11* received a warm reception for everything save its unlockable content, which initially required heavy grinding or real-world spending. *Mortal Kombat 11: Aftermath* debuted in 2020 and included all the earlier DLC.

MORTAL KOMBAT 1 2023

VARIOUS

If you're confused by the name, you're hardly the only one, but the latest *Mortal Kombat* is so named as it's another series reboot. Like 2011's *Mortal Kombat* the standard character roster is comprised exclusively of returning characters, with the likes of Ashrah, Nitara and Reiko ending their long-term absences, while DLC allows you to add Homelander, Omni-Man and Peacemaker to the mix. Kameo Fighters like Sonya, Cyrax and Frost don't mix it up as part of the main action, but leap in to assist your primary character in a similar manner to the Strikers in *The King Of Fighters* series. As has become expected, the game has received very positive reviews.

MOBILE KOMBAT

IF YOU LIKE YOUR GORE ON THE GO AND YOUR BRUTALITY ON THE BUS, MORTAL KOMBAT HAS YOU COVERED

Rush hour commuting can inspire bloodlust in even the most committed of pacifists, so it's no surprise that *Mortal Kombat* has found its way to the lucrative smartphone market. The flagship game for Apple and Android devices, simply titled *Mortal Kombat*, originally launched in 2015 and is still actively updated today. Though it's presented as a one-on-one fighter, it doesn't try to replicate the complex controls of the console games – instead you tap the screen to attack, hold it to block, and use well-timed swipes and presses for extended combos, special moves and Fatalities. The game is free to play, but characters are obtained and upgraded via packs of cards which are naturally available for real money.

A new mobile game titled *Mortal Kombat: Onslaught* was announced in 2022, and is an RPG set in an alternate timeline, with group beat-'em-up battles taking place across both an exclusive single-player story and competition against other players. Though the game launched in some regions in 2023, it is yet to become available in the UK.

WENDY

2 HITS

Psychic Force

NOTHING TO GET JUMPY OVER

» PLAYSTATION » 1996 » TAITO

For a very long time now, I've had a fascination with a very specific type of fighting game. Rather than adopting the *Street Fighter II* template wholesale, these games attempt to do something different with the genre. They also have anime-inspired storylines and characters, and often some of the worst voice acting to grace a home console. If you present me with games like *Destrega*, *Evil Zone* and *Tech Romancer*, I'm all in – and I think *Psychic Force* is the game that kicked this off.

Psychic Force takes place in the futuristic year of 2010, where the NOA group, led by the villainous Keith, want to establish an ideal world for their kind – the awkwardly dubbed Psychiccers who have psychic control over elements like wind and flame, and are reviled by regular humans. Burn and his Anti-NOA team stand in their way, while a couple of unaffiliated fighters without psychic powers want to kill them all. In game terms, fighters hurl projectiles at one another at distance and engage in physical combos up close, but do so while floating around in a big cube – which means there's no jumping. It's not the most refined game in the world, but I do love it for its style, Wendy's questionable Australian accent and some pretty fine music.

Though *Psychic Force* received a sequel that added new fighters and refined certain aspects of the game, Taito left the series dormant after the second game. But the *Psychic Force* fighting model has something of an evolutionary successor in the *Senko No Ronde* series, created by the ex-Taito staff at G.Rev. The game has a similar concept but was marketed more as a hybrid one-on-one fighting shoot-'em-up, ramping up the projectile count at the cost of precision, and doing away with any lingering notions of gravity. If you're looking for something a bit different to the standard fighting fare, both series are well worth exploring. ✱

EMILIO
PSY
MAX

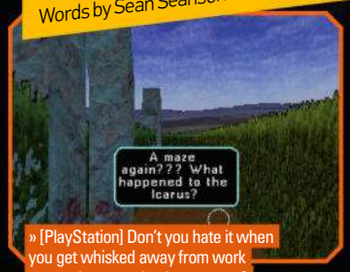
Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

PSYGNOSIS PLAYSTATION GAMES

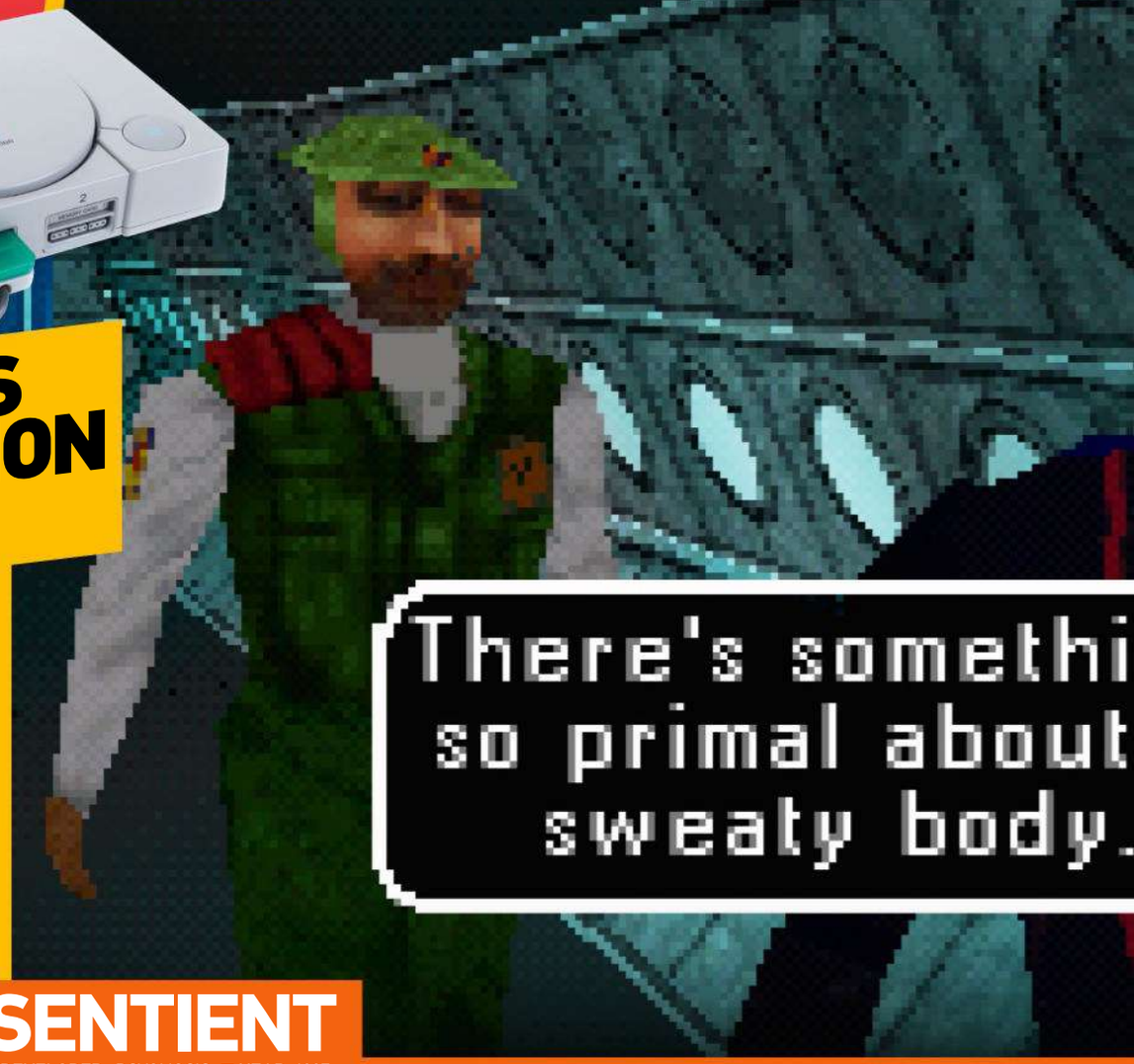
It played a huge role in the breakout success of Sony's first console and gave us iconic series like WipEout and Colony Wars, but did you know Psygnosis brought over 50 games to the original PlayStation? Let's take a look at some you might have missed

Words by Sean Seanson



» [PlayStation] Don't you hate it when you get whisked away from work to wander around a dream maze? Actually, that doesn't sound so bad!

» [PlayStation] The Space Station Icarus flying a little too close to the sun. Who could have seen that coming?



SENTIENT

■ DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS ■ YEAR: 1997

■ **You probably wouldn't think it just by looking at it, but *Sentient* is one of the most ambitious games to ever grace the PlayStation.** In this first-person adventure title, you take the role of medic Garritt Sherova, who has been sent to investigate a breakout of radiation sickness aboard the Space Station Icarus, only to arrive and find out that might be the least of his worries. With the captain dead, the crew divided and the Icarus on a collision course with the sun, things are clearly sounding quite dire.

But of course, since you have protagonist powers, only you can save the station from certain destruction, and you do this by walking around and talking to people, as is adventure game tradition. This may not sound very exciting, but few games do walking and talking quite like *Sentient*. You see the crew of the Icarus, all of whom feature unique AI patterns and dialogue, well they each have their own goals and personalities, and depending on how you interact with them, it can lead to different paths and endings in the game. This is all done by using an impressive dialogue system that allows you to ask a variety of specific questions about characters, items, or even directions to somewhere else on the ship.

The characters might oblige and help you, or maybe they won't. It depends on your reputation and how you've interacted with the various other characters on the station. On top of this, the game is also running in real-time, meaning characters will wander around the large and maze-like space station, interacting with each other and going about their tasks, even if you're not there. It's a game where, as an outsider, you really need to rely on the crew to help you both navigate around and get to the bottom of what's going on, and thanks to the game's very in-depth systems, there are dozens of ways you can accomplish this.

Sentient also features some of the most surreal imagery you'll see in a game from this era. Whether it's the oppressive halls of the Icarus and its suitable range of retro-future

» [PlayStation] Just one of the many bizarre interactions you can have with the crew. The guy in the back seems impressed at least.

gizmos, or the crew, who are sporting some of the most hilarious and terrifying facial scans imaginable, it's a game that definitely lingers in the mind. The problem, however, is that while it's hard not to admire the scope of *Sentient*, it unfortunately just isn't all that fun to play. The game is held back by its repetitive environments, confusing navigation, and very cumbersome control scheme, which would have made it a chore to get through in 1997, let alone 2023. It's a game that demands a lot of patience and commitment from the player, but those willing to stick with it, will be rewarded with one of the most unique experiences the PlayStation has to offer.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

DEFCON 5

PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC, 3DO, 1995

■ *Defcon 5* is a slow-burning and immersive first-person action title that sees you play as an engineer tasked with protecting a deep space mining installation from unknown alien attackers. The end result is an interesting blend of action and strategy.

PLANET LAIKA

PLAYSTATION, 1999

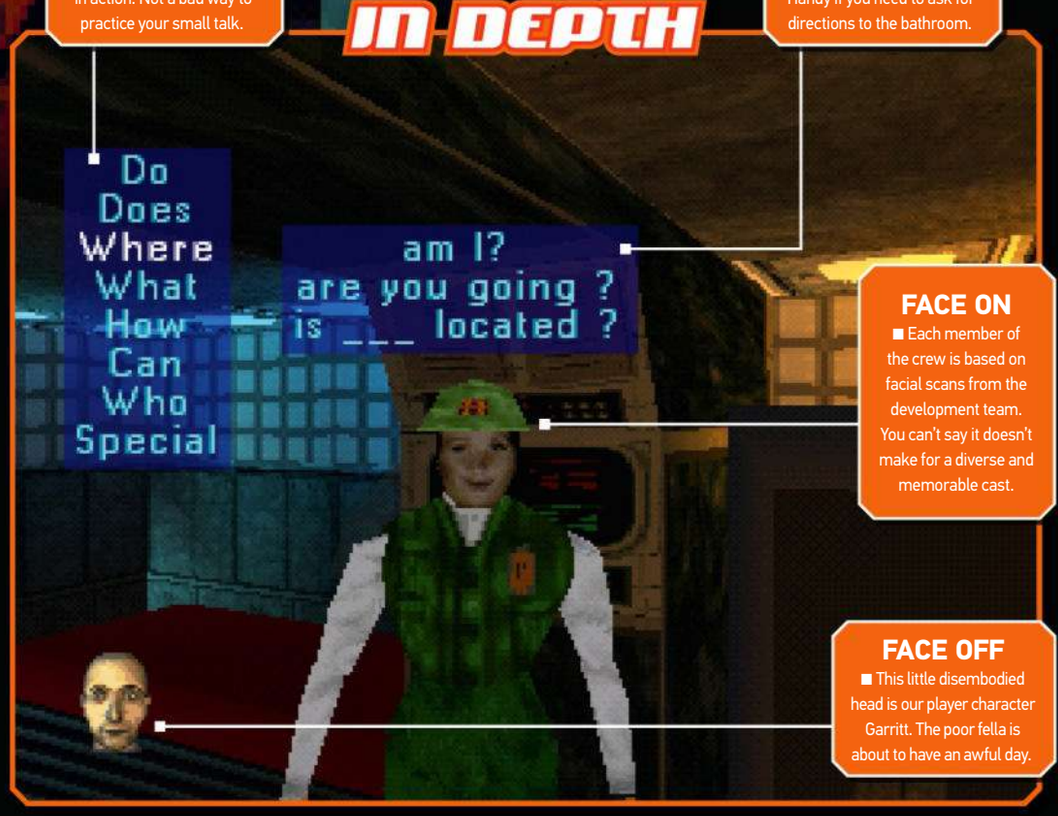
■ This Japan-exclusive RPG from developer Quintet about an anthropomorphic dog with dissociative identity disorder visiting Mars is somehow even stranger than it sounds. It also recently received an English fan translation, so there's never been a better time to experience this oddity.

MARTIAN GOTHIC UNIFICATION

PLAYSTATION, PC, 2000

■ *Resident Evil* meets *The Lost Vikings* in space, but if any of your three playable characters meet up in the same location, they fuse into a ball of meat and the game ends. It's certainly one of the more unique survival horror experiences out there.

IN DEPTH



TALK TO ME
■ An example of the impressive dialogue system in action. Not a bad way to practice your small talk.

WHO AM I?
■ Dialogue options branch off into a variety of new choices. Handy if you need to ask for directions to the bathroom.

FACE ON
■ Each member of the crew is based on facial scans from the development team. You can't say it doesn't make for a diverse and memorable cast.

FACE OFF
■ This little disembodied head is our player character Garritt. The poor fella is about to have an awful day.

Minority Report

ASSAULT RIGS

■ DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS ■ YEAR: 1996

■ If you were to ask a kid in the early Eighties to imagine what videogames would look like in the future, we get the feeling *Assault Rigs* is what you'd end up with. This early PlayStation release allows you to partake in the hot new sport of the future, which is putting on a VR headset and blasting some foes in your weird cyber tank. Combat is a core and enjoyable part of the experience, but your goal in each level is to simply collect a set number of gemstones and then reach the exit before time runs out, which sounds simple enough, but the quick-fire levels will toss a variety of new and exciting obstacles in your way.

You'll have to navigate mazes, puzzles, and even platforms to succeed in *Assault Rigs*, and keep in mind that this is all while driving a tank, of which you'll have three to choose from, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. These tanks, along with the environments, receive visual updates throughout the game. One minute you're in cyberspace hanging out with the bizarre mouths and eyeballs fused into the walls, and the next you're carefully navigating platforms in the treacherous industrial zone. If you're a fan of arcade classics like *Battlezone* or *Cyber Sled* but crave something with a bit more substance, *Assault Rigs* should be right up your alley.

» [PlayStation] You can choose from a number of different viewpoints, handy for tracking down hidden gems!

» [PlayStation] Platforming in a tank game? What on Earth will they think of next?

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» MONSTER TRUCKS

■ DEV: **REFLECTIONS**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ Known as *Thunder Truck Rally* in the States, this was Reflections' final game with Psygnosis before it ran off to create the very successful *Driver* series. Sure, it's just *Destruction Derby* with monster trucks, but that's not exactly a bad thing, is it? Unfortunately, the developer did replace the arena mode with a car-crushing minigame, which is tragically nowhere near as fun as it sounds.

» RETRO FORCE

■ DEV: **PSYGNOSIS**
■ YEAR: **1999**

■ As the name would imply, this PAL-exclusive time-travelling shoot-'em-up is a throwback to the classics, only now sporting fancy polygonal graphics and a Y2K aesthetic. It follows the *Xevious* formula of ground and air combat but mixes things up with some cool rail-shooter segments during boss battles. It's far from a classic, but the visuals and soundtrack are sure to impress.

» KINGSLEY'S ADVENTURE

■ DEV: **CAMDEN STUDIO**
■ YEAR: **1999**

■ It took until 1999 for Psygnosis to produce its own cute 3D mascot platformer for the PlayStation, and the result is *Kingsley's Adventure*, a game about a little fox knight and his quest to save a kingdom of cute rabbits. While it doesn't break new ground in the genre, the dark and atmospheric levels do help the game stand out from the crowd.

» SHADOW MASTER

■ DEV: **HAMMERHEAD**
■ YEAR: **1997**

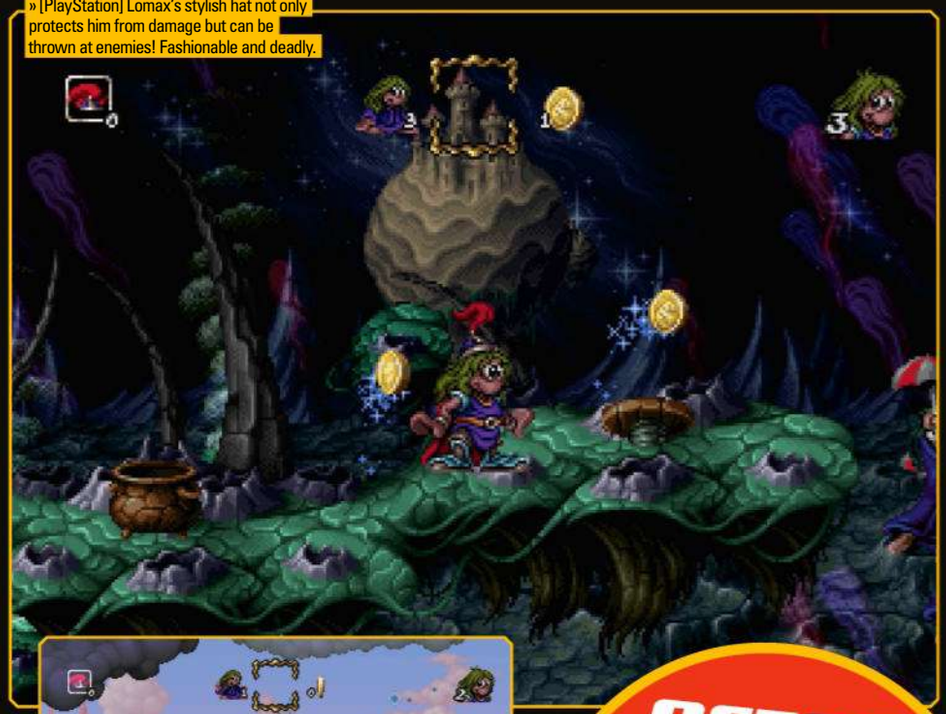
■ Developer HammerHead is perhaps best-known for porting id Software's *Quake II* to the PlayStation. However, its first game, *Shadow Master* is also quite the technical showpiece, delivering us next-level visuals and effects for a 1997 console release. Notably, it also featured support for Sony's original dual analog controller, making it one of the earliest console FPS games to include a dual analog control option.

LOMAX

■ DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS ■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Known as *The Adventures Of Lomax* in North America, this spin-off of the much-loved *Lemmings* series sees you take control of the titular Lemming Knight in what is one of the most beautiful and brutally difficult 2D platformers the PlayStation has to offer.** The gameplay and visual style of *Lomax* will be quite familiar if you played the team's previous effort, *Flink* (1994), only this time around *Lomax* requires you to utilise some classic *Lemmings* abilities like digging and building to progress through its 22 levels. Sure, the majority of the game still revolves around a steady mixture of running and jumping, but the implementation of these iconic lemming abilities into the platformer gameplay really helps give the game its own identity while still honouring its *Lemmings* roots.

Unfortunately, like most early 2D games that made it to the console, it was largely criticised upon release for not pushing the graphical capabilities of the system, and it probably didn't help that it was released during the height of 2D platformer fatigue. Of course, *Lomax* would have the last laugh, as its gameplay and visuals have arguably held up better than the majority of early 3D games that made it to the console. In particular, the pixel art, courtesy of industry legend Henk Nieborg, is some of the very best the generation has to offer. Don't sleep on this gem!



» [PlayStation] Lomax's stylish hat not only protects him from damage but can be thrown at enemies! Fashionable and deadly.

» [PlayStation] Use your spin attack to free trapped lemmings! Even if it means they'll immediately jump off the nearest cliff.

RETRO STINKER

» PSYBADEK

■ DEV: **PSYGNOSIS** ■ YEAR: **1998**

■ **A psychedelic extreme sports platformer sponsored by VANS sounds like a pretty odd mix, and you'd be right!** It's a shame that the awful gameplay never lives up to its wacky premise.

» ELIMINATOR

■ DEV: **MAGENTA SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1998**

■ **The result of what happens if you put *The Running Man*, *WipEout* and *Twisted Metal* in a blender.** This vehicular combat game sees you play as a prisoner trying to earn their freedom by navigating through some particularly deadly timed obstacle courses for the viewing public at home. If it sounds stressful, that's because it is, but it also makes for a visceral and rewarding experience.

» BLAST RADIUS

■ DEV: **CAMDEN STUDIO**
■ YEAR: **1998**

■ **Built using the *Colony Wars* engine, this 3D space shooter gives us a more action-focussed take on the genre.** What the game lacks in story, mission variety, and atmosphere, it makes up for with simple arcade-style combat, gorgeous visuals and an excellent techno soundtrack. If you like shooting stuff in space without worrying about the political ramifications, it's well worth a try!

» TEAM BUDDIES

■ DEV: **CAMDEN STUDIO**
■ YEAR: **2000**

■ **Don't let the cute and colourful gameplay of *Team Buddies* fool you.** Beneath its cheery veneer lies a brutally difficult real-time strategy game, full of foul-mouthed pill-like creatures called Buddies that take great pleasure in tearing one another to shreds with a wild arsenal of vehicles and weaponry. A late highlight on the console and also the final game to feature the Psygnosis Owl logo.

» RIOT

■ DEV: **BEYOND REALITY**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ **Fans of *Speedball* should enjoy Riot, which does a decent job of hurling the frenetic chaos of futuristic sports into the third dimension.** Known in the US as *Professional Underground League Of Pain*, Riot is an entertaining offering that has a good mix of teams, leagues and arenas and easy-to-understand mechanics. It's certainly a fun way to waste a few hours.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

FINISHING MOVES

The opportunity to finish a fight in spectacular fashion is the whole point of starting one, whether you're sticking it to the CPU or humiliating a friend. Here are some time-tested techniques ranging from the stylish and painful to the utterly bizarre…

SPINE RIP

We may have *Mortal Kombat* on the mind this issue, but Sub Zero's original Fatality was a real shocker back in 1992. The ninja simply rips his opponent's head off with the backbone still attached, neatly preparing them for a career as a backbench MP. *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* hid the decapitation behind a black screen, but later games restored it. In a word? Gory.

RAGING DEMON

Even though you never see the pain actually being inflicted, this has been iconic ever since Akuma first took out M Bison to initiate the secret boss fight in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. It's all about that atypical move input, the strange stance as he slides forward and the special win pose you get for finishing a round with it. In a word? Stylish.

POGOSTICK

Chukklez may look more at home at the Gathering Of The Juggalos than the wrestling ring, but *Def Jam Vendetta*'s resident clown is no laughing matter and this move more than proves it. First he slams his opponent's head into the mat, before using them as a pogo stick – arms for footholds, legs for handles, skull repeatedly smashed on the canvas. In a word? Innovative.

JEALOUSY BOMBER

Aggressors Of Dark Kombat isn't exactly the best-known fighting game, but Kisarah Westfield's Ultimate Technique is truly memorable. Knowing that jealousy is truly agonising, she gives her opponent the love bug via an unblockable projectile before summoning a handsome man to kiss in front of them, breaking their heart. Real-life experience tells us that these situations are genuinely painful. In a word? Creative.

ROAD ROLLER

■ You may think that dropping a steamroller on your opponent would be sufficient to kill them very dead. Dio Brando, the villainous vampire in *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, would beg to differ. Having apparently never heard of restraint, he leaps on top of the enormous vehicle and delivers rapid punches to it before hitting an elbow drop, causing it to literally explode. In a word? Overkill.

GRAND SLAM HOMER

■ Dio's not the only one who brings heavy machinery to a fight, but at least Hayato Kongo expects his opponent to do the same. What his opponents in the cut-throat world of *BCV: Battle Construction Vehicles* might not account for is his mobile crane arm transforming into a baseball bat, then knocking their bulldozers clean out of the stadium that suddenly appears. In a word? Unexpected.

STONE COLD STUNNER

■ Mechanically, it's just a kick to the gut followed by a jawbreaker. But as various WWE licensed games show, with some dynamic camera work and the right reaction from the opponent, it's a convincing fight finisher. Also, let's be honest – if you ever loved watching Vince McMahon take a Stunner, it's a move you've probably imagined yourself performing at some point. In a word? Satisfying.

STIMULATING FISTS OF ANNIHILATION

■ *Guilty Gear*'s Faust may be a medical genius, but this anal assault is a malpractice lawsuit in the making. He sinks into the ground and clasps his hands together, index and middle fingers extended, then delivers an impromptu poke in the prostate to the unfortunate foe. It's the close-up reaction shots that give the comedy edge to this unpleasant rectal raid. In a word? Intrusive.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

Katamari 塊魂 Damacy

THE GENIUS OF DESIGNER KEITA TAKAHASHI SHINES IN 2004'S KATAMARI DAMACY, ONE OF MANY DELIGHTFULLY LEFT-FIELD JAPANESE RELEASES FOR THE PLAYSTATION 2. NAMCO WOULD GO ON TO CHURN OUT SEQUEL AFTER SEQUEL, BUT TAKAHASHI'S JOYOUSLY UPBEAT ORIGINAL REMAINS UNBEATABLE

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

It's difficult to imagine a major games publisher putting out something as strange and wonderful as *Katamari Damacy* today. With development costs locked in an ever-upwards exponential spiral, publishers are more risk averse than ever, more likely to double down on existing, proven successes than take a punt on something new. Leave that to the indie darlings with little to lose.

But things were different in the days of the PlayStation 2. With development costs still relatively low, big publishers were more willing to take a chance on experimental or niche games within the budget or mid-price range. The huge success of the PS2 helped: with so many consoles in people's homes, even the strangest title could find an audience, and Japanese publishers kept them well supplied. Koei published the cult hit rhythm action game *Gitaroo Man*. Sony put out the strange tale of *Mr Mosquito*. Capcom explored existential dread with *Gregory Horror Show*. And Namco released one of the most joyfully unhinged games of all time: *Katamari Damacy*.

The set up couldn't be simpler. You have a sticky ball called a Katamari, and the aim is to use it to gather up as many objects as you can within the time limit. You can only pick up objects that are smaller than the Katamari, but as you attach more and more things to the ball, it gets bigger and bigger, and you can roll up larger and larger stuff. This is the core appeal of *Katamari Damacy*, a combination of catharsis and excess.

At the very start, your tiny ball is only big enough to pick up things like dice and drawing pins, and you'll be menaced by snails and mice, which will knock objects off your Katamari if they collide with you. But as you make your Katamari bigger, there will come a point when the tables are turned, and the mice begin fleeing for their lives as your giant ball of sticky doom bears down on them. And so the pattern repeats

» [PlayStation 2] He might look rather regal, but the King Of All Cosmos is lazy, leaving his son to clean up the mess that he's made.

» [PlayStation 2] Sure, it's heavily compressed, but this wacky cinematic intro effortlessly captures the sheer silliness of the theme tune that accompanies it.

KEEP ROLLING, ROLLING

HERE ARE FIVE TIPS FOR A HAPPY KATAMARI LIFE

LINGER AT THE START

■ Usually the starting area is stuffed with small objects that will stick to your tiny Katamari, but the objects tend to get bigger further on, and thus act as obstacles to your little ball. Hoover up as much stuff as you can to grow your ball before moving on.

KEEP MOVING

■ Starting and stopping your Katamari is a slow process, so it's best to keep moving at all times rather than dilly-dallying along the way to nab every last trinket. Keep rolling – any items you miss can be nabbed the next time you roll around.

FLIP THOSE TURNS

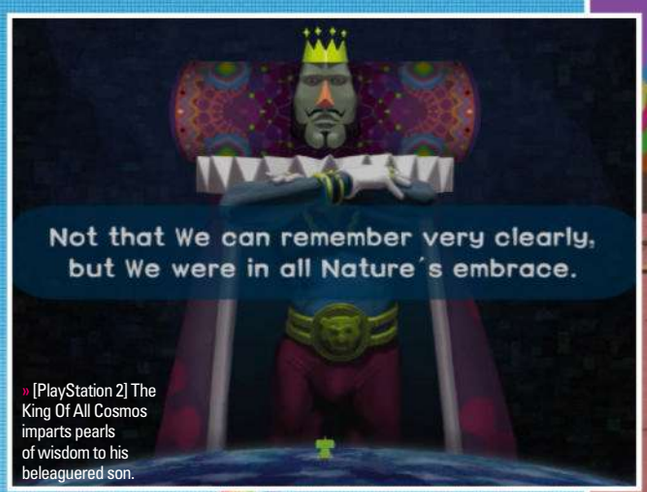
■ If you're heading towards a wall or obstacle, do a quick turn by pressing L3 and R3 simultaneously, which will cause the Prince to hop over the Katamari and face the opposite direction. It's much quicker than slowing down and rotating the Prince around the ball.

BOOST JUDICIOUSLY

■ The boost move involves waggling the sticks, which more often than not means you'll accidentally point the Katamari the wrong way and end up colliding with something and losing objects. Save the boost for big, open areas or when your Katamari gets stuck.

LOOK AND JUMP

■ Don't forget to use L1 to look around you: there are various trails and crevices that are easy to miss, as well as a Royal Present and one of the Prince's cousins to find on every level. Likewise, hit R1 to leap up and get your bearings from time to time.



» [PlayStation 2] The King Of All Cosmos imparts pearls of wisdom to his beleaguered son.

» [PlayStation 2] From butterflies to strawberries and nails, no item escapes the Prince's Katamari. You can even capture humans.

"THE KING IS THE WORST DAD IMAGINABLE, CONSTANTLY PUTTING DOWN THE "PEE-WEE PRINCE", AND NEVER BEING SATISFIED WITH THE PRINCE'S HERCULEAN EFFORTS"

THWACK!
Until your katamari is large enough, you can only roll up moving people and cars after hitting them. Most animals can be rolled up as they are.

"THERE WILL COME A POINT WHEN THE TABLES ARE TURNED, AND THE MICE BEGIN FLEEING FOR THEIR LIVES AS YOUR GIANT BALL OF STICKY DOOM BEARS DOWN ON THEM"

[PlayStation 2] The game's cutscenes do a tremendous job of highlighting the ensuing absurdity.

[PlayStation 2] Your cousins are hidden throughout the game. Find them and they'll congregate on this Space Mushroom.

[PlayStation 2] Your Katamari has already reached its target size. Keep going and maybe you'll receive some kind words from the king…

WORLDS OF WONDER

WE REVISIT KATAMARI DAMACY'S BEST LEVELS

KOTATSU SNAIL BATTLE

■ The first level is also one of the best, as you roll on and under a kotatsu (heated table) occupied by a man seemingly oblivious to the army of snails, mice and cats rampaging around him. You'll come back to this location several times, and each time it's slightly different. And look, you're on telly!

SWAN CHAOS

■ To recreate the Cygnus constellation, the King Of All Cosmos orders you to collect as many swans as you can. Rolling over an egg causes the bird inside to hatch and flap wildly while it's stuck to your Katamari, resulting in a David Cronenberg-esque flapping-swan-ball monster.

BREAKOUT

■ There's a lovely moment on one of the later Town levels when your Katamari grows big enough to exit the starting playground area, and you're catapulted down a steep hill (reminiscent of *Sonic Adventure* or *Crazy Taxi*) and into a shopping district packed with people.

CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

■ In order to make the Corona Borealis constellation, you naturally need to gather crowns, and happily, someone has left a load of them lying about the place. Teddies in crowns, dogs in crowns, vegetables in crowns… the King suggests nicking them and then running away if anyone asks.

AVOID A BEAR

■ The Make Ursa Major level mixes things up a bit in that collecting a single bear will immediately end the level. If you want to create a massive star, you'll have to carefully avoid all bears and collect everything else, until your Katamari is large enough to snare the biggest bear possible.

from level to level, with pesky cats soon getting their comeuppance, then humans, then elephants. By the end of the game, you'll be rolling up continents. Catharsis and excess. Take that, Earth.

It's all framed by the most wondrously silly plot. The King Of All Cosmos, a giant celestial being with a stupendous ruff and all-too-revealing tights, has gone on the biggest of all benders. While "in Nature's embrace" he has somehow managed to ricochet off the stars and the moon, completely destroying them. But rather than fix the problem himself, he calls upon you, his diminutive, cylinder-headed son, to sort it out for him, by rolling up objects from Earth that he can turn into new stars.

The one-sided conversations between the King and the Prince are often very funny, but there's also a darkness there. The King is the worst dad imaginable, constantly putting down the "pee-wee Prince", and never being satisfied with the Prince's Herculean efforts. The time constraints on each level are explained as the length of time that the King is willing to "believe in you" before his attention wanders elsewhere, and as the player, your task boils down to desperately seeking attention and praise from your belligerent and lazy father. The king's unbelievable callousness is often funny, but it's sad, too.

At the same time, there's the uneasy question of what happens to all those living things you roll into a ball. Humans literally scream as they are inescapably embraced by the ever-growing Katamari, their eventual fate to be shot into space and ignited as part of a new star. As a player, you are essentially instigating a planet-wide cataclysm, gradually stripping Earth of all life. This darker purpose forms an incredible juxtaposition with the relentlessly cheery soundtrack and joyous nature of the colourful graphics and gameplay. Hold on, are we the bad guys?

The excess of *Katamari Damacy* is encapsulated by the sheer number and variety of objects to gather on each level. Mahjong tiles, fish-shaped soy sauce packets, nail clippers, lipsticks, potties, spatulas, water pistols, laundry poles… the list is endless, and the mundane domesticity of the things you collect is juxtaposed brilliantly by the chaos and bizarre humour all around you. Everywhere you look there are tiny absurdist vignettes – cymbal-bashing toy monkeys holding a conference, a cat riding around in a tower of shopping baskets. It's the perfect conflation of the mundane and the fantastic, a way of injecting joy into the everyday.

It's also a fascinating insight into Japanese life. The first level begins on top of a kotatsu, a table with a blanket around the edges and a heater underneath for keeping your feet warm in the winter months. It's an everyday gadget in Japanese homes, but excitingly exotic to Western eyes, along with objects like Hina dolls, takoyaki and mosquito coils.

The controls do a fantastic job of representing the Prince heaving around

» [PlayStation 2] Try and keep your Katamari as round as possible during play, otherwise it's tough to control.

REMASTERING KATAMARI

THE LONG-AWAITED RETURN OF THE MASTER

■ In 2018, Bandai Namco launched *Katamari Damacy Reroll* for Switch and PC, and the game was later ported to PS4, Xbox One and Stadia (remember that?). This remaster marked the first time that *Katamari Damacy* was made available in Europe: the original PS2 game was only officially released in Japan and North America.

Wisely, the remastered version of the game leaves it untouched for the most part. The graphics have been recreated in high definition, but otherwise they retain the characterful blockiness of the original. *Katamari Damacy* is one of those rare PS2 titles whose looks still hold up wonderfully well today, thanks to the game's quirkily stylised graphics.

A few little improvements have been made here and there. For example, if a wall obscured the camera in the original, the kanji for Katamari would appear to show the rough location of your ball behind the wall. But in the remaster, a circular hole appears in the obstruction so you can still see what you're doing.

However, the 'push both sticks up to roll' controls feel strange on the Switch or Xbox as a result of one stick being higher than the other, and as a result it's best played with a PS4 pad. Alternatively, there's now the option to switch to 'simple controls', with the left stick governing movement. The success of the remaster led to Namco remastering *We Love Katamari* as *We Love Katamari Reroll + Royal Reverie* earlier this year.

MUSICAL ODYSSEY

NAAAAAA-NA-NA-NA-NA-NA-NAA-NA, KATAMARI DAMACY

■ It's almost impossible to think about *Katamari Damacy* without the game's signature theme tune popping unbidden into your head. The game's intro is a wild musical journey of blaring trumpets and bongos, accompanied by psychedelic visuals of singing ducks, dancing pandas and sprouting mushrooms, all underpinned by that insistent chorus of "Naaaaaa-na-na-na-na-na-naa-na, *Katamari Damacy*".

Katamari Damacy's brilliant music was mostly created by Yuu Miyake, who had previously worked on Namco's *Tekken* titles, starting with the third game. Miyake was given full freedom to create whatever he liked, and he ended up composing a truly eclectic and brilliantly fun soundtrack that ranges from electronic beats to jazz to samba. Many of the tracks feature vocals, and the singers include Eighties J-pop star Yui Asaka and the anime voice actors Nobue Matsubara and Ado Mizumori, among others.

The soundtrack was released on CD and vinyl as the album *Katamari Fortissimo Damacy* in 2004, and both IGN and GameSpot declared it to be the soundtrack of the year.

a giant, unwieldy ball. Pushing up on both sticks rolls the Katamari forward, pulling down rolls it back, and pushing diagonally up and left or right causes it to veer in the respective direction. Pushing up on one stick and down on the other, meanwhile, sees the Prince rotate around the ball, ready to push it from another angle. The act of pressing up with both sticks is a good analogy for the Prince pushing with all his might with both hands, and the ball is achingly slow to move at first, but soon gains momentum and quickly becomes almost uncontrollable as it picks up speed, like a snowball rolling down a hill. You'll find yourself constantly heaving back on the sticks in an attempt to avoid collisions with a wayward cat or sumo wrestler, with the Katamari feeling pleasingly weighty and in constant pull from the forces of gravity. It results in a game that requires your full attention at all times, just to keep the ball rolling in the direction you want it to go.

The game's creator, Keita Takahashi, studied sculpting at university but decided to move into videogames when he graduated, and ended up taking an artist job at Namco. As revealed in the excellent *Boss Fight Books* volume on *Katamari Damacy*, he came up with the characters of the King, Prince and Queen first, and originally envisaged them starring in a *Crazy Taxi*-style game where the Prince would 'drive' humans by attaching steering wheels to their heads. The idea for using a ball to pick up objects came later, and was inspired by the game of tamakorogashi played at school sports days, where students roll around a giant ball.

There was no internal process for Namco artists to pitch a game at the time, so instead Takahashi persuaded students on an educational course called the Namco Digital Hollywood Game Lab to help him make a prototype, which he could then show to the higher ups. This unorthodox move paid off, and Takahashi was given a small budget of around 100 million yen to create the game, which took about a year and a half.

Throughout, Takahashi resisted calls from management to add more complexity. He was right: the game doesn't need it. There's a pure joy to rolling a Katamari around, the only aim to make it bigger and bigger. *Katamari Damacy* benefits from a clarity of vision, a simple progression that logically ends with the Prince rolling up the very Earth itself. Takahashi would return to direct a sequel, *We Love Katamari*, but after that game's release he declared he was leaving the game industry with the idea of designing playgrounds instead. He later returned to videogames, creating the joyously strange *Noby Noby Boy* and *Wattam*, among others. But he remains a consummate outsider. "I don't feel like I'm part of any videogame industry," he told Eurogamer at around the time of *Wattam*'s release.

We need people like Takahashi, people who tear up tradition and approach gaming from an oblique, unexpected angle. We need indie developers to keep creating those weird games that mainstream publishers once created themselves in the PS2 days. Here's to being strange. ✱

» [PlayStation 2] The bigger your Katamari gets, the harder it is to control. The game's physics are genuinely impressive.

» [PlayStation 2] We're not sure why that snowman hasn't melted yet. Oh well, we're going to roll him up anyway.

KATAMARI SEQUELS

CORE KATAMARI GAMES TO LOOK OUT FOR

WE LOVE KATAMARI

PS2, 2005

■ Released the year after *Katamari Damacy*, this sequel was also directed by Keita Takahashi, and offers new level objectives, such as rolling a sumo wrestler over food so he can bulk up. The plot follows the King of All Cosmos as a boy, as he faces up to his overbearing father.

ME & MY KATAMARI

PSP, 2005

■ The first game made without the involvement of Takahashi, this PSP title sees the King and his family taking an island holiday, only for the King to accidentally devastate the landscape with a tsunami. The Prince is then tasked with creating new islands by – you guessed it – rolling up stuff.

BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI

Xbox 360, 2007

■ This time, the King accidentally rips a hole in the fabric of space with a powerful tennis serve, causing everything except the Earth to be sucked into a black hole. The Prince then has to recreate the sun, planets and other celestial bodies, before finally plugging the black hole with a super-giant Katamari.

KATAMARI FOREVER

PS3, 2009

■ The first half of *Katamari Forever* takes place inside the King's mind, where the aim is to restore his memory by bringing back colour to the grey levels. The second half follows the plot of the first game, although this time it's a RoboKing created by the Prince and his cousins that destroys the stars.

TOUCH MY KATAMARI

PS Vita, 2011

■ This PlayStation Vita launch title makes use of the Vita's back touch panel, which allows players to squash and stretch their Katamari, but otherwise it follows the same formula. The IGN review neatly sums up the post-Takahashi world of *Katamari*, "A steady procession of sequels have only served to echo the original's quirky brilliance rather than evolve or enhance it in any meaningful way."

» [PlayStation 2] If you needed further incentive, *Katamari Damacy* keeps a note of everything the prince rolls up.

» [PlayStation 2] You've still got a long way to go before you reach the required target. Quick Prince, get rolling!

"WE NEED PEOPLE LIKE TAKAHASHI, PEOPLE WHO TEAR UP TRADITION AND APPROACH GAMING FROM AN OBLIQUE, UNEXPECTED ANGLE"

CLIVE TOWNSEND

His name is one that will resonate with most ZX Spectrum fans in particular. Creator of the wonderful Saboteur games, Retro Gamer chats ninjas, rising robots, cataclysmic power cuts and more with Somerset's most famous Speccy programmer

Words by Graeme Mason

Having engendered a programmer's mentality early on in his life, Clive Townsend began coding on the Sinclair ZX81 before moving to its successor, the ZX Spectrum. The embodiment of a teenage coder, Clive created several games for his local software house, Durell Software, before working steadily in the games industry, following a familiar path of Game Boy, mobile and PC development throughout. Having rediscovered his ZX Spectrum roots with recent homebrew releases, it's high time we learned more about the man behind one of the Spectrum's most extraordinary series of arcade adventures. This is Clive Townsend, In The Chair.

» A clip from Clive's appearance on the BBC.

Hello Clive! Do you remember your first encounter with videogames?
Hello! I can't remember the first game, but I remember being at school registration, and one of the guys wasn't there. Someone said, "He's at the railway station, playing *Space Invaders*!" and I had visions of him running around with his arms out pretending he was a rocket, and it turned out it was a computer game! That was the first time I'd ever heard of one.

Do you remember your first encounters with computers?
We didn't have computers at school until the fifth year when the school got an RM380Z, a big old beast of a machine with a green-screen monitor. We'd write programs on square paper and take turns trying our programs out.

And at home?
A friend of mine had a ZX81, and we typed in listings together, most of which didn't work as there was always a typo somewhere. So, we had to debug to try and figure out how it worked. I think that's where I started programming, and I was keen to get a ZX81 myself – until my friend told me the ZX82 was coming out. So I grovelled to my parents to get one as a joint Christmas and birthday present. And then my birthday, which is in June, came, and they actually got me a Spectrum! I started experimenting with the Speccy, making some games in BASIC, and discovered a compiler to speed up my code.

Did you try to sell these games?
Yes, I went to a local shop called The Spectrum Centre, which was actually a camera shop and had no relation to the ZX Spectrum. I said to the guy in there, "I've made some games, will you sell them for me?" They agreed but said a local software house was nearby that made real games.

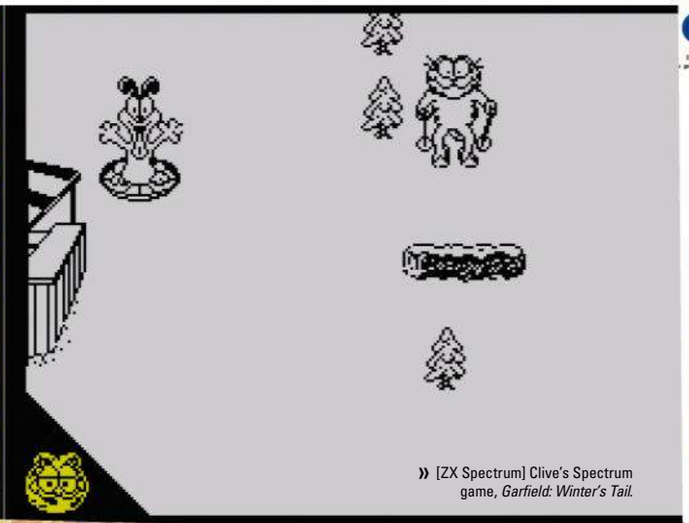
Presumably Durell Software?
Yes, and I went off to see them. The first thing they said to me was, "Here's a game called *Jungle Trouble*, we want to see if you can make a copy of it without using tape to tape," – in other words, to try and crack the loader, which wasn't too difficult!

How did you do it?
I merged the BASIC instead of loading it so it didn't autorun, and then I could see what was happening. That seemed to impress the boss, Robert James Durell White, which was where Durell's name came from, and as I was only 16, he said I could return in the school holidays.

Did Durell offer you a job once you'd finished school?
They did, but I went to college, doing maths, physics and art. But back when I was at school, I didn't like the head teacher, and it turned out that she'd moved to the same college! So, after about a year, I decided to take up the job offer. I went back to Durell, and fortunately, it was still there.

What games did you work on initially?
They asked me to write the Spectrum conversion of *Harrier Attack*. I went home to my mum's and wrote a side-scroller, which took me a few hours, but my mum got annoyed thinking I was just playing on the computer all the time and turned off the mains power. I lost everything and had to go back to Durell and say I hadn't done anything yet. They said, "Don't worry," and gave the project to Mike Richardson; I think it sold a million copies, earning Mike £250,000. I could have had that if my mum hadn't turned the power off…

» [Amstrad CPC] Clive's one contribution to the Amstrad version of *Death Pit*: its loading screen.



» [ZX Spectrum] Clive's Spectrum game, *Garfield: Winter's Tail.*

Somerset
County Gazette

Established 1836 — Price 35p — FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1985

Top teen hit is name of the game for computer ace

TAUNTON teenager Clive Townsend has hit the jackpot in the competitive field of computer games.

For he has invented a game which has crashed into the national top ten charts just five weeks after its release.

The game, "Saboteur," has been hailed already as a "classic," and it has elevated Clive, of Belsdens Road, to a £25,000 salary ... at the age of 18.

Yes Clive, who describes himself as "basically a very lazy person," struggled with his A-level studies at the Richard Huish College, Taunton.

He said: "I was given the choice — either work or leave — and I chose to leave, with nine O-levels to my name."

Clive knocked on the doors of Taunton-based Durell Software Limited, which produces computer games at its Castle Green premises. "The boss quite liked a few ideas I'd come up with on a computer my father bought me three years ago."

Managing director Mr Robert White, who set up Durell's ... here three years ago from a bedroom, said: "He told me if we didn't employ him he'd go and do down under a bee. But we were actually quite impressed with some of the work he'd done himself."

Clive, who joined the com-

By ROD HANCOX

pany in May, 1984, spent 12 months working on his first game. "It was called 'Death Pit' and it isn't worth talking about, other than to say I learned a lot from it."

He worked first months on "Saboteur," which "Computer Trade Weekly" described as "without doubt one of the best arcade games seen for a long time." Another specialist magazine, "Crash," dubbed it a "classic," stating: "Saboteur must be one of the most original games of 1985."

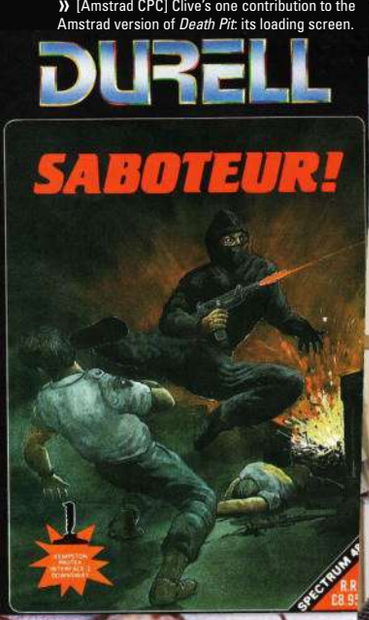
The idea of the game is to infiltrate a secret computer complex, steal a disc, plant a bomb, and escape by helicopter before the complex explodes. The saboteur arrives, makes his way to the complex by sea in a dinghy, then climbs a pier, explores a warehouse, travels through a sewer system to the complex, dodging dogs, guards, and laser-operated security cameras. It is currently at number ten on the Micro Dealers UK Top 50.

Clive Townsend

Mr White said: "This game is all Clive's — all the graphics are his own; it all came from him. We expect to sell at least 100,000 copies of 'Saboteur' as Clive is going to be very successful with this game, and hopefully with the follow-up.

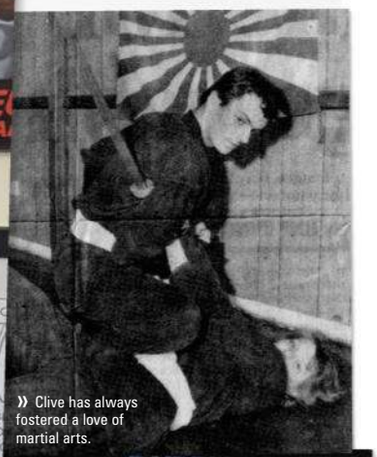
"When Clive joined us he was very determined, even though he was working initially for a very low salary. He is a terrific character and he has done really well."

» *Saboteur* brought fame for young Clive Townsend – well, at least in Somerset!



» Clive sporting some official Durell merch.

» Clive proudly shows off the Spanish releases of *Saboteur* and *Saboteur II.*



» Clive has always fostered a love of martial arts.

> "We'd write programs on square paper and take turns trying our programs out"
> Clive Townsend

» [ZX Spectrum] Clive used friends' names for the characters in the Ubisoft game *The Reaper.*

» [ZX Spectrum] The one that got away. How would a Clive Townsend-programmed *Harrier Attack* have turned out?

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **WESTLAND 30** [1983] ZX SPECTRUM
- **DEATH PIT** [1983] ZX SPECTRUM
- **SABOTEUR** [1985] VARIOUS
- **SABOTEUR II** [1987] VARIOUS
- **THE REAPER** [1990] ZX SPECTRUM
- **GARFIELD: WINTER'S TALE** [1990] VARIOUS
- **SUPER JAMES POND** [1993] GAME BOY
- **PINKIE** [1994] VARIOUS
- **X-IT/ZONKED** [1994] AMIGA
- **RISE OF THE ROBOTS** [1994] GAME GEAR
- **WATERWORLD** [1995] MEGA DRIVE
- **MICKEY MANIA** [1995] PC
- **ANIMAL** [1996] PC
- **THUNDERBIRDS** [2000] GAME BOY COLOR
- **BUGGY BOY** [2004] MOBILE
- **JEZZ BALL** [2004] MOBILE
- **SONIC JUMP** [2007] MOBILE
- **SABOTEUR 1.5** [2015] VARIOUS
- **SABOTEUR 2.5** [2017] VARIOUS
- **ENHANCED SABOTEUR** [2018] VARIOUS
- **ENHANCED SABOTEUR II** [2019] VARIOUS
- **THE IRON WOLVES** [2021] ZX SPECTRUM
- **NINJA CARNAGE** [2021] ZX SPECTRUM
- **SABOTEUR DEEP COVER** [2021] ZX SPECTRUM
- **SABOTEUR REMASTER** [2023] ZX SPECTRUM

» [ZX Spectrum] Clive's loading screen for *Saboteur II* got its inspiration from a, ahem, men's magazine.

> It was the Eighties, so there was ninja stuff everywhere
> Clive Townsend

» Clive is busy working on a trio of Spectrum Next games.

» [ZX Spectrum] *The Reaper*'s speech bubbles often offered naughty words.

» [ZX Spectrum] This is a rather epic loading screen and depicts your hero preparing to plunge into *Death Pit*'s depths.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Saboteur III: Avenging Angel* features robotic guards and pumas as enemies.

» [ZX Spectrum] Exploring the upper reaches of the base in *Saboteur.*

Oh dear! What did you work on next?
They were working on a game called *Death Pit*. There was Ron Merson, the Commodore programmer, and another Ron [Jeffs], the BBC programmer, and his character [in *Death Pit*] was relatively sedate, almost like a *Sabre Wulf* character who'd plod along. But there was another guy called Phil Dierks, who was doing the Amstrad version, and his character was tall and gangly and could jump across gaps with his long legs – so when they asked me to do the Spectrum version, I based it on the short guy, but faster.

***Death Pit* was famously advertised but not released. What happened?**
I almost completed it, but my version wasn't quite as good as Durell's other games, probably because I was still learning then. Durell also scrapped the BBC version, and the Amstrad one was re-written. At least they used my loading screen for that one!

While you were working on *Death Pit,* you were beavering away on a side project, we believe…
Yep. It was the Eighties, so there was ninja stuff everywhere. A mate and I used to watch a lot of ninja films, Jackie Chan and so on, and I thought it would be cool to have a ninja running around doing a mission in a game as a combination of James Bond, ninjas and Batman. Before I had finished *Death Pit*, I brought a demo of this game, *Ninja Darkness*, to show Durell.

***Ninja Darkness,* of course, became *Saboteur.* What did Robert think of it?**
He said it was good, but the scrolling was too slow – he told me to make it a flick-screen game. I thought that was a convenient way of solving the speed problem as it only updated the bits of the screen I needed. And it turned out that I only needed one guard: as you left the room, I just stored the guard's position and animations and loaded in the next guard's data – and that code carried on running. If it hadn't been a flip-screen game, you might have simultaneously had two guards on the screen. This way, all my guards worked automatically and much more efficiently.

How did he feel about the game's sprites?
Robert did like the big sprites – I could have these because of the static backgrounds, and I did all the graphics for the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad versions, sketching them freehand on squared paper. They aren't actually sprites, but a layer of background characters, a layer of ninja characters, guards and dogs. So what I would do is start in the top left, get the first background block, copy that into an 8x8 box, overlay a ninja if there was one in that square and foreground as well, and so on, and when I had that, I drew it onto the screen so there was never any flicker. But sometimes, with the speed I was doing this, there was a bit of tearing. In the remaster, I did it more efficiently.

Were you programming on a Spectrum?
Yes, I'd have the source code in memory, assemble a bit of code, save that to tape and then load in my graphics, data, and the bit of code I'd just made, test it, then load in my source code and assembler from tape, and process it all over again. It was a bit of a nightmare, and sometimes it wasn't worth going back and fixing a bit of code; I just wrote another bit of code and used that instead. I don't think I even had all the source code in one location, it was on lots of little files all over the place.

It was lucky your mum didn't turn the power off again!
[Laughs] Fortunately not… at that point, I think I might have left home!

Did you do everything for *Saboteur*?
I wrote the music player, but I didn't actually write the music, and to this day, I still don't know who did the tune. But yes, the game design, graphics and code were all me. The picture in the main menu is based on an advert in a karate magazine. Incidentally, the *Saboteur II* loading screen was based on a woman in a porn magazine – there was no internet, so it wasn't easy to find pictures of leather-clad women!

Research is fun! Moving on… your health regenerated if you didn't move in *Saboteur* – what gave you the idea to do that?
I didn't know better, basically – if I'd had known more about other games and how they did it, I'd probably have copied them if that was the done way. If you stand around, your health returns as you get your breath back. Conveniently, that ends up working in parallel with the time limit, giving a sense of tension – either stop and rest as the clock is ticking away or run as fast as you can, but then risk a slight fall or guard killing you instantly.

Durell wasn't big on sequels, but *Saboteur* got one – how did that come about?
When *Saboteur* first came out, a TV crew turned up at Durell's offices while I was asleep at home. I had to quickly chuck some clothes on, and they said, "You're on TV in ten minutes!" So I just answered some questions, and the last one was, "What's next?" and I said I think I'll send the same ninja out on a different mission. I said that before speaking to the boss about it, and his wife had already asked why there weren't more female characters in computer games. I didn't see how a female ninja would be less efficient than a male one, so we took a chance and hoped it would work. It was risky – this was way before *Tomb Raider* when suddenly everyone wanted female characters.

***Saboteur II: Avenging Angel* is similar in style – how did you try to differentiate it from the first game?**
The code is pretty much the same; I took out bits, and some early screenshots still have dogs in them. So, I took it apart and added more in. I wanted a bigger map, but that was a trade-off for speed, as it wasn't quite as smooth as I wanted. We'd started using Apricot F1 computers for development – I'd write my code on the PC and then transfer it to the Speccy, so if the game crashed, I could send it across again instantly. Compared to my difficulties with *Saboteur*, this dramatically reduced development time.

While we're on the *Saboteur* games, tell us about your new revamped versions.
Saboteur 1.5 was my online version. It's still *Saboteur*, but with an extended story – you play the Speccy game, and then it keeps going. It was for PC, but since then, it's gone on to Nintendo Switch, GOG and Epic.

And now you're working on a remaster?
That's for the 48K Spectrum after I disassembled all the code and finally gathered it all in one place. Then, I reorganised it and sped up the routines as my knowledge of Z80 has improved over the years, and just rearranging the data makes the code more efficient and the game faster. There are lots of extra graphics here and there and shadows, which I always wanted to do, but it was another layer I didn't have the memory or speed for [back then]. But now I have a simple formula: if there's a solid block, then down and to the right, there will be a shadow, which works pretty well.

> "When Saboteur first came out, a TV crew turned up at Durell's offices while I was asleep at home"
> Clive Townsend

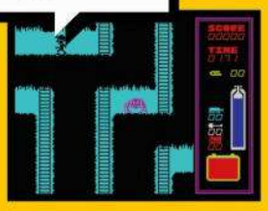
***Saboteur II* was your last commercially released game for Durell. What happened?**
They stopped making games because it cost too much and it was too risky. Robert [White] realised that one failed game could take them down. My big plan had been for *Saboteur* to spread to consoles and PC after *Saboteur 3* on the Atari ST and Amiga. But the last game I worked on [for Durell] was an unreleased Speccy conversion of an arcade game called *Trojan*. It was mostly complete, although we only had three levels compared to the arcade's six – maybe they were planning to have the other three on the other side of the tape?

What did you do after Durell went back to the business software industry?
I'd earned enough in two years to buy a three-bedroom house – but it was just a big toy to me, so I sold it and bought a van to live in. It gave me an excellent perspective on how people treat you depending on what material things you have, and ended up as the template for the intro of *The Reaper*.

That was your first post-Durell game, right?
I'd continued making Spectrum demos and games, and *The Reaper* was something

FIVE TO PLAY

Make sure you experience these gems by Clive



DEATH PIT

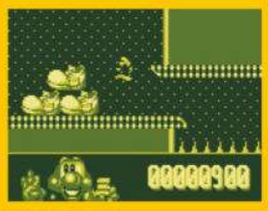
■ Deemed unworthy of release in 1985, *Death Pit* has been rediscovered thanks to Clive and Monument Games. It's a fun maze game, and it is hard to imagine it wouldn't have reviewed well at the time. The main character moves sharply, and there is plenty to explore.

SABOTEUR

■ This is Clive's masterpiece, an open-world arcade adventure that presents its brilliantly evocative scenario with verve and superb technical skill. Guide your ninja around the complex, gather data disks and rig the place to blow before escaping.

SABOTEUR II: AVENGING ANGEL

■ Several new elements appeared in this follow-up caper. Alternate missions, a bigger maze and more enemies and objectives frequent the massive building, and there's a neat intro with the female ninja jumping in from a hang-glider.



SUPER JAMES POND

■ The Nintendo Game Boy was a natural progression for many ZX Spectrum programmers, and Clive helped create this pared-down port of the fun 16-bit platformer. While notably diverse from the original aesthetically, the gameplay suits the handheld.

SABOTEUR: DEEP COVER

■ Over the last few years, Clive has rediscovered his love of programming on the Spectrum, culminating in this text adventure from 2021. Created alongside the late Andy Remic, this 128K-only game is still available from Cronosoft Software's website.

» [ZX Spectrum] Fending off enemy attacks in *Saboteur.*

» [ZX Spectrum] Preparing for a covert landing in *Saboteur II.*

> Mobile games were in their infancy, so they were perfect for me to work on in a small team
>
> Clive Townsend

SABOTEUR CONTINUES

Retro Gamer looks at the many iterations of Clive Townsend's classic ninja epic

COMMODORE 64

■ Coded away from Clive by Branko Špoljarić, this is a faithful port of *Saboteur*, albeit one lacking some of the original's features. Source code would have helped!

AMSTRAD CPC

■ A nightmare project for Clive himself as he implicated new code into existing routines. Pushed for time, he admits he could have done better – but it's still decent.

COMMODORE 16

■ This cut-down C16 game combines Clive's classic with a platform style. Nonetheless, it's an admirable effort at squeezing the game into limited memory.

ATARI XL/EX

■ This fan remake from 2015 uses the C64 version, accurately following its gameplay. "I don't know how they tricked the machine into display colour," Clive says.

SABOTEUR 1.5

■ Clive's own remake from 2015 features the entire Spectrum original together with a shiny new panel and an extended plot and map.

SPECTRUM RE-RELEASE

■ George Cropper's Bumfun Software released cassette versions of both *Saboteur* and its sequel in 2018 with a brand-new cover by Jamie Ball.

MEGA DRIVE

■ Clive is currently working on a remastered and improved version of *Saboteur* for Sega's Mega Drive. This will include a cartridge release of the 8-bit classic.

SPECTRUM REMASTER

■ Clive is also just putting the finishing touches to this remastered version of *Saboteur.* It will be available on ZX Spectrum 48K shortly.

SPECTRUM NEXT

■ The Next version of *Saboteur* is currently undergoing testing and musical enhancement. Expect a brand-new cover and much-improved visuals.

» [Game Gear] The late addition of extra memory meant cutscenes and little else for this handheld port of *Rise Of The Robots*.

» [Game Gear] Not one of Clive's favourite projects: *Rise Of The Robots*.

I created just as an excuse to put all my friends' names into a game. Everyone seemed to like the large sprites in the *Saboteur* games, so it seemed sensible to do something similar. But I wasn't sensible, so I made a game with tiny sprites, adding rude language, thinking it would get banned or become controversial, and everyone would rush out and buy it. They didn't. Ubisoft published it, everyone hated it and then forgot about it.

Inevitably, you drifted away from the Spectrum after coding *Garfield: Winter's Tale* for Edge.
While staying at my mum's in 1993, I spotted an advert for a games programmer. As luck would have it, they wanted a coder for *James Pond II: Robocod* on the Game Boy, a RISC Z80 processor, and not a huge leap from the Spectrum. When I finished, I was offered a full-time job at Data Design. I worked on several platforms for them, including PC, Master System, Mega Drive and Game Gear.

Ah yes, the Game Gear – didn't you convert a certain notorious beat-'em-up to the Sega handheld?
Yes – *Rise Of The Robots*. The game was dire and too big to fit into the system – we were told to use the 256K cart. There weren't enough sprites – you could only do one robot, so I had to make the second one part of the background. This meant I could scroll the background and move the sprites around, but there were no background graphics. So I ended up having interrupts all down the screen, changed the colour of each line, and sort of made a background out of that. You couldn't turn around as there wasn't any room for other graphics. It was all a struggle, and they told us we could have the 512K cartridge in the end! As it was the day before it was supposed to be delivered, all we could do was put some cutscenes in. It was a horrible project to work on. If it had been a fun game, it might have been different.

How did you find this period where gaming moved from computers such as the Amiga to consoles?
Today, you can actually make games using a computer. We lost a generation of programmers when it went to consoles because you could buy a console but couldn't program it. I still have some dev kits for the Game Boy Color – it was four grand just to connect your computer to the Game Boy. So there was no homebrew stuff at all, and then gradually, it has come back.

You moved into mobile development in the Noughties, including for the doomed N-Gage…
That was after Pukka Games closed down. Mobile games were in their infancy, so they were perfect for me to work on in a small team. I founded Incognito Games in 2002 and created several apps for early Nokias and the N-Gage. *Gypsy* is like a Magic 8-ball, *Abstraction* is a simple puzzle game, while *Rocketeer* combines two of my favourites, the flying and collecting aesthetic of *Jetpac* and the bubble-bursting of *Pang*.

Looking back, why do you think *Saboteur* appealed to so many fans in the Eighties?
It was serious rather than cutesy, so it treated its players as if they were a bit older – and it had big sprites. The ninja phase of the Eighties was also helpful, and I think people were similar to me in that they'd grown up on James Bond, spies and martial arts.

What are you up to today?
I'm just putting the finishing touches to three Spectrum Next games that I hope to reveal at the Crash Live event in November: new versions of *Saboteur* and *Saboteur: Deep Cover* and *Quantum Storm*, a *Breakout* clone.

Is the period working for Durell the fondest time in your career?
I don't think I realised how much fun it was then – *and* I actually had money! I had no experience of work beyond working for an electrician for a few months in the summer holidays – when I was 12! – so other than that, I've never had a real job. It's been a strange life.

Making games is a real job, Clive!
Yes, sorry! I meant I've never had a boring job!

Our thanks to Clive for his time. Check out Clive's website, clivetownsend.com, for news on all his upcoming games.

CT SCAN

Clive Townsend Trivia

■ Clive's first computer was a 16K Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

■ Clive got into trouble at school for swiping several maths exercise books, perfect for drawing Spectrum graphics.

■ Working with Mike Richardson (*Turbo Esprit*, *Thanatos*, etc) was a great help to Clive during his Durell days.

■ As a martial arts fan, one of Clive's favourite Speccy games was, predictably, *Bruce Lee*.

■ Clive's first Spectrum game, the abandoned *Death Pit*, was eventually released by Monument Games in 2018.

■ Many *Saboteur* fans spent hours in vain trying to locate the machine gun featured on its cover.

■ Despite its move into computer games, Durell still produced business software in the Eighties. Clive himself worked on the administration package, Insurance Master. It's not quite as exciting as *Saboteur*.

■ Clive is a huge comics fan and owns an impressive *Batman*/*Detective Comics* collection. He also created his own comics, most notably *Shadow Warrior*.

■ After Durell ceased game production, Clive worked as a security guard at his dad's warehouse and as a gymnastics coach at a school. Two of the pupils at the school were HRH Princess Anne's children.

■ *Saboteur*'s ninja was inspired by the star of Eric Van Lustbader's *The Ninja*, a modern-day update of the character. The fight at the end of the first book takes place at the top of an unfinished skyscraper – similar to the girders and stanchions at the summit of *Saboteur*'s warehouse.

■ *Saboteur II* boasts a set of eight high-score tables, one of which would appear at random. Clive's eclectic mobile roster includes *ChuChu Rocket*, *Sonic Jump*, *The X Factor* and *Jezzball*.

■ Clive is a self-confessed hoarder. His house is home to hundreds of CDs, comics, books and, of course, classic ninja movies.

■ On the subject of movies, Clive's favourites are the breakdancing flick *Beat Street*, *The Matrix* and *Enter The Ninja*, starring Sho Kosugi.

Ridge Racer V

POLE POSITION CURSE

» PLAYSTATION 2 » 2000 » NAMCO

How much do launch games really matter? If the PlayStation 2 is any indication, not much. Sony's second console is widely considered to have had a pretty poor selection of games on day one, but it went on to become the best-selling console of all time. Was it actually that bad in the first place, though? Looking back, the best games of the launch line-up cover a variety of genres and had plenty to offer anyone lucky enough to have made it through the preorder nightmare. Those lucky few could have walked out of the store with *Fantavision*, *SSX*, *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *Timesplitters*, or of course *Ridge Racer V* – hardly shabby.

There's no doubt that Namco was playing it safe with *Ridge Racer V*. If you're familiar with the series, you'll find familiar features like tracks with shared elements, extreme drifting and an excellent soundtrack. The game lacks the story of *Ridge Racer Type 4*, but makes up for it with a greater variety of Grand Prix championships, and while the visuals aren't perfect – it's infamous for aliasing issues and the 50Hz-only PAL version is disappointing – it's the first home-console *Ridge Racer* game to run at 60 frames per second. All in all, it's a high-class game.

The overwhelming hype for the PS2 had people expecting truly revolutionary gaming experiences from day one, but the truth is that the PS2 wasn't an easy machine to develop for and developing launch games always involves time pressure, which created a gap in expectations. *Ridge Racer V* seemed to suffer from this, as contemporary reviews of the game often read as though they're judging the game based on what it was expected to be, rather than the very good if unambitious arcade racer that it is. That feels unfair, so give it a go the next time you sit down for a PS2 session – it's long overdue a proper reappraisal.

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AT 4
mph

» We're diving into the bloodthirsty action of Mortal Kombat 1 for the main course this month – can it improve on the strengths of its predecessor? Over the page, you'll find more reviews including Dynablaster, Horizon Chase 2 and a new Evercade release

» [PS5] The graphics have been nailed, as characters and their moves look fantastic in action.

Mortal Kombat 1

BLOODY GOOD

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PS5
- **ALSO ON:** XBOX SERIES X/S, SWITCH, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £64.99
- **PUBLISHER:** WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

This is probably going to sound hypocritical coming from Retro Gamer, but NetherRealm Studios may be dangerously obsessed with the past. The post-Midway era of *Mortal Kombat* began with a reboot, and only one regular sequel followed before the developer went back to the nostalgia well with a time-travel adventure. Now we've got another reboot, but where the 2011 reboot seemed intent on recapturing an audience that had lost interest, *Mortal Kombat 1* has been designed with the knowledge that the world is already paying attention.

» [PS5] Kano pulls out the heart of his opponent, but he's just a Kameo Fighter.

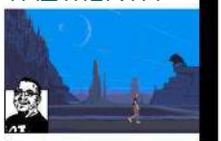
With that in mind, NetherRealm has been relatively conservative with the fighting model. The most notable introduction is the Kameo system, which is much like the Striker system from *The King Of Fighters '99*, allowing each fighter to pick an assisting character. These characters include the likes of Kano, Goro and Frost, and they can be brought into the fight to perform special attacks, assisted throws and combo-breaking interventions, as well as Fatalities. Beyond that, Fatal Blow attacks return from *Mortal Kombat 11* but split offensive and defensive gauges are gone, replaced with a simplified segmented gauge. The Variation system has also been axed.

Mortal Kombat's cinematic Story modes have been ideal in allowing players to get a feel for the various fighters while enjoying a bit of martial arts drama, and this aspect of the game is as good as ever. It also shows where NetherRealm has been bolder, as Liu Kang's newly restarted universe has allowed for the reintroduction of characters like Ashrah, Nitara and Havik from the less celebrated

BRIEF HISTORY

» Following Kronika's defeat in *Mortal Kombat 11*, Liu Kang has given up his role of Guardian Of Time and now serves as the God Of Fire – but not before resetting the universe in an attempt to maintain peace between realms. However, it would be a dull game if malignant forces didn't force Earthrealm and Outworld to resume hostilities.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

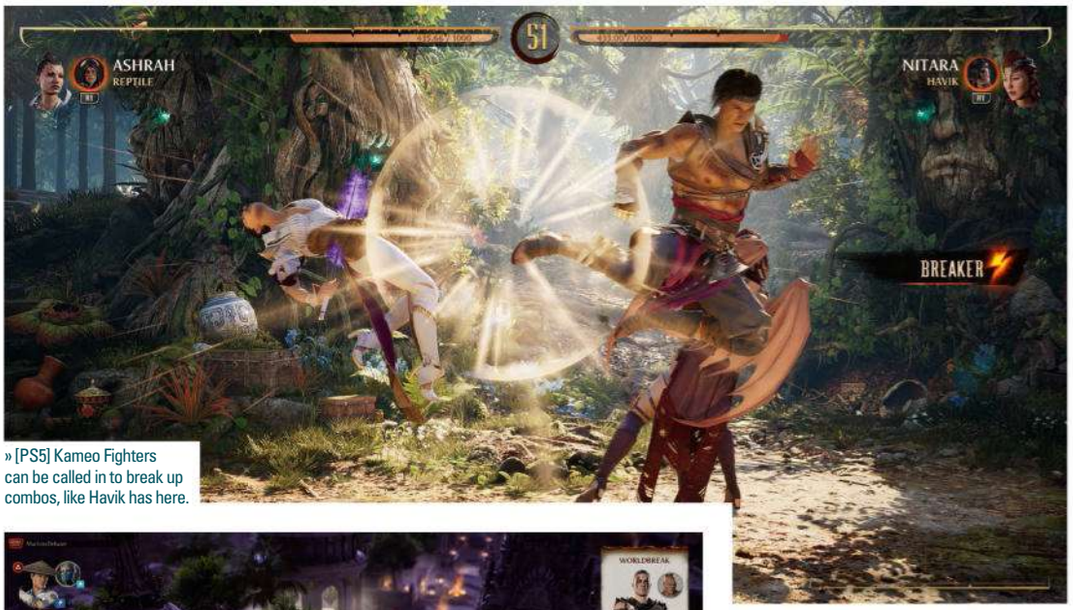
Evercade: Delphine Software Cinematique Collection 1

It's light on games, but I've enjoyed revisiting the likes of *Flashback* and *Another World*. *Future Wars* has also been fun.

NICK

Mortal Kombat 1

I'm not as boring a player as I used to be. Sure, I might like playing as Sub-Zero and Raiden, but now Nitara is one of my main characters too.



» [PS5] Kameo Fighters can be called in to break up combos, like Havik has here.

» [PS5] Here's a look at one of the boards you'll encounter when playing Invasions.

PS2-era games, and their inclusion makes plenty of sense. You'll also see some surprising new depictions of more established characters, and it's a joy to get to know them all over again.

Traditional Towers return, and the other major single-player mode is Invasions, a board game-style affair. In this mode you traverse areas that feature various encounters with modified rules – characters gain elemental weaknesses, random hazards are introduced and items can be used. These are rather substantial experiences and will be refreshed at regular intervals, so should offer plenty of longevity if handled correctly. For that to happen, a little more variety will be needed in future seasons – right now the fights are occasionally broken up by projectile Survival challenges and Test Your Might scenes, but very little else.

Versus and Tournament modes are robust, and online play is serviceable but unspectacular. Likewise, a lot of data is available for the hardcore player but the Tutorial mode feels a step behind the best offerings in the genre. Players who love to dress up their characters will lament the fact that customisation options aren't quite as extensive as in *Mortal Kombat 11*, but it does also feel less aggressive in pushing microtransactions than the previous game did. One thing we do really appreciate are the accessibility options, including additional audio cues, a screen reader, colour blindness options and the ability to turn off button-bashing scenes in the Story mode.

It's a very good-looking game that runs beautifully on PS5, and the music keeps fights very exciting. However, Switch players should be aware that while the inevitable graphical cutbacks are present, they haven't resulted in a consistent framerate and the result is a distinctly second-class experience compared to other platforms. Time will tell whether any major improvements can be made to the portable experience. We have more reason to expect that patches over the course of the game's life will smooth out some of the bugs the community has already noticed, including one which allowed player one to hit combos that player two couldn't.

There's no doubt that *Mortal Kombat 1* is a very well-made game, and one which will likely sell extremely well. However, it does feel like NetherRealm is tinkering around the edges of the *Mortal Kombat* experience, compared to the big step forward *Street Fighter 6* felt like. There's a certain wisdom in not fixing something that isn't broken, but likewise it's not possible to get very far if you keep going back to the beginning in the way that NetherRealm has been doing. We're very happy with this, but we'll expect some more radical changes next time around.

In a nutshell

A very good *Mortal Kombat* game that doesn't take many risks. Fans will love it, but rival games are doing more to push the genre forward.

» Score **83%**

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
MORTAL KOMBAT II

▼ SOMETHING NEW
STREET FIGHTER 6

» [PS5] These Test Your Might scenes are a fun throwback, but aren't mandatory in Story mode.

» [PS5] As you'd expect from *Mortal Kombat*, lashings of gore accompany certain moves.

» [PS5] Backgrounds range from the beautiful to the bleak, but all are well constructed.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade: Sunsoft Collection 1

» **System:** Evercade series (tested) » **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

One thing we've noticed about recent Evercade carts is that the collection of games contained on them is becoming smaller and smaller. The first ten releases in the console range boasted an impressive 122 games, while the last ten (including *Sunsoft Collection 1*) contain just 72, that's quite the drop off. It initially suggests that newer collections don't offer the value for money that they once did, but as always, it comes down to the quality of what's contained on the cartridge.

While the six games found on *Sunsoft Collection 1* certainly won't blow you away, we feel the cartridge still presents very good value, particularly if you were to try and obtain these games for their original formats. If we're honest, that's one of the biggest strengths of the Evercade brand – official accessibility.

Mr Gimmick is a wonderfully quirky platformer that originated on the NES and still holds up today, while *Aero The Acro-Bat* is one of the weaker games on the collection, but is still perfectly sufficient. *Blaster Master* is a cracking little platformer with action elements that started off on the NES, while *Blaster Master Boy* is actually a Game Boy sequel to *Robowarrior*. It's another action title and very enjoyable. The final two games are *Arabian*, a wonderfully frantic single-screen platformer and *Journey To Silius* an entertaining run-and-gun.

The presentation is exactly what you'd expect from Blaze with a nice little manual, and we had no issues with the emulation, which seemed really solid. There were also no issues playing across the EXP or VS (we didn't test the original handheld). While we've really enjoyed the deep cuts found on Blaze's latest collection, we can appreciate that its focus on platforming may put some off. This is a very good selection, but don't be surprised if there's another bundle of Sunsoft games announced soon.

» Score **74%**

» [Evercade] We've never experienced *Arabian* before and it's brilliant fun. It originated in arcades, but this is the Famicom version.

» [Evercade] *Mr Gimmick* is silly money nowadays, so this collection represents a fantastic way to own a legitimate physical copy of it.

Horizon Chase 2

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC, iOS
» **Buy it for:** £19.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

We loved the original *Horizon Chase*, as it effortlessly captured the spirit of console racers like *Top Gear*. Sadly, while there's plenty to enjoy with this sequel, it doesn't quite capture the majesty of the original. The World Tour returns and it's filled with well-designed tracks and challenging AI, while there's a good range of vehicles and unlockables. The online side of the game is perfectly fine as well with a number of challenges and there's even the ability to play against PC owners, although it was sometimes hard to find games. Sadly, we experienced quite a few crashes during play and the framerate is also erratic which takes away from the overall experience. Here's hoping a patch will improve things.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **68%**

Dynablaster

» **System:** Switch (version tested), Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC, Mac » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £17.99

***Dynablaster* was a European brand name for *Bomberman* in the early Nineties, and while the character isn't present here, the familiar gameplay is.** Regular battles are on offer with online and local multiplayer, and key-collecting challenges against the AI can be taken on solo or with a friend. The graphics aren't great but the action does at least run smoothly, and you can customise your character with points earned during gameplay. It's a pretty lean package for the price and while it offers some fun – this formula is hard to screw up – we just can't imagine anyone picking it over the *Super Bomberman R* games.

NICK THORPE

» Score **55%**

Shark! Shark!

» **System:** Switch (version tested), Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC, Mac » **Buy it for:** £13.49
» **Buy it from:** Online

Just as in the Intellivision original, *Shark! Shark!* casts you as a fish that must eat smaller fish. Doing so encourages growth, which expands the range of edible fish but slows you down – which becomes a big problem when the shark makes its regular rounds. Plenty of new enemies have been added, but eating progressively larger quotas of fish does become monotonous over 12 rounds of single-player action. Fortunately, the addition of multiplayer for up to four players gives *Shark! Shark!* some greater longevity, with a limited but well rounded selection of modes available including co-op and competitive play. All told, this is a decent refresh of a cult favourite.

NICK THORPE

» Score **71%**

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Hurry!
Voting closes
Oct 27

Watch Live! November 10 @ 4pm GMT

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THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [C64] THE TITLE MENU OF WILD WOOD. --->

<INTRO> THERE IS A HALLOWEEN FEEL TO THIS MONTH'S COLUMN, AS WE VENTURE DOWN TO THE WILD WOOD WITH C64 ARTIST JOHN HENDERSON AND SUFFER MORE SCARES WITH CODER ANDY VAISEY IN HIS LATEST PROJECT. IF YOU LIKE PUTTING ON COSTUMES, BE SURE TO CHECK OUT SAM'S JOURNEY ON THE NES FOR ITS MULTIPLE OUTFITS THAT REALLY CHANGE UP ITS GAMEPLAY. FINALLY, MULTIFORMAT CODER UNDER 4MHZ ROUNDS THINGS OUT WITH HIS CLEVER CODING. </INTRO>

<!--- ARTIST AND DESIGNER OF THE INCOMING WILD WOOD, JOHN HENDERSON. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

WOODS GONE WILD

<INTRO> ARTIST AND DESIGNER JOHN HENDERSON – WITH A LARGE PROGRAMMING TEAM – IS DEVELOPING THE GORGEOUS-LOOKING C64 GAME WILD WOOD </INTRO>

<BODY> **"*Wild Wood*'s setting was roughly based on the dark location described in *The Wind In The Willows* by Kenneth Grahame," John Henderson tells us.** "I've always loved the natural world. I was excited about building a world of open fields, gothic cathedrals, river banks, catacombs, underground warrens, woodland glades, lost druid settlements and cosy homes in trees, and then populating it with animals." That includes the hero, a courageous hare. "I wanted a character which hadn't graced the C64 before, that would fit into *Wild Wood* as being prey," explains John. "This choice does affect gameplay, in terms of platform spacing and level design; a hare is quick and feisty and has a strong, athletic leap. The player has a few moves that look natural, and a couple more unusual feats (such as a barrel roll). The hare is not aggressive – it won't be pulling out a shotgun or start biting things – but it is not without offensive moves."

Inspiration for *Wild Wood* came from John's sketches and numerous other sources. "For an 8-way scrolling level, I will roughly sketch a map before I begin and think of features – for instance, the huge kneeling Angel statue in the Cathedral – drawing the main tiles with unique chars to build key sections," he continues. "The parallax-heavy horizontal-scrolling levels take a lot of planning. I draw each layer individually and plan the foreground 'edges' which frame background scrolling areas as this is key to making everything flow." The designed sprites are also looking gorgeous. "For animations, I sometimes use film clips as reference," John continues. "For very large creatures that use multiple sprites, I physically draw the frames in a flick book, then scan and port them before adjusting. It's a lengthy process, but worth it. I use SpritePad and CharPad by Subchrist Software. These tools are always being improved and the creator was kind enough to make some special adjustments for *Wild Wood* a while back when I needed it."

WOODLAND FOLK

ARGUS

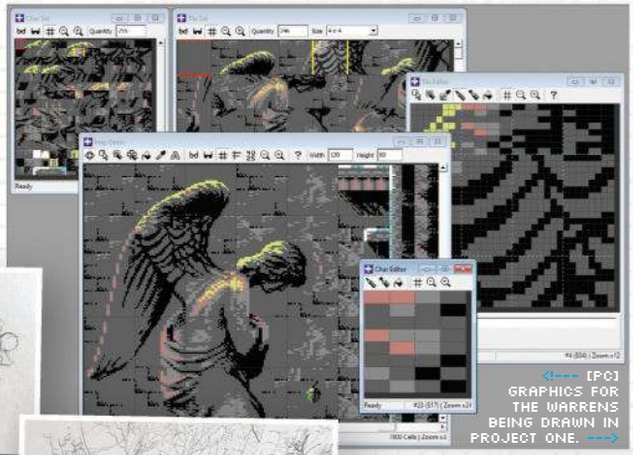
<Achim Volkers coded this massive first-person RPG for ICON64/Psytronik. It's inspired by the Psygnosis 16-bit game *Obitus*./>

ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL

<John's bitmap introduced this cool platform game, with great cover tunes by NM156 (making music for *Wild Wood*)./>

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

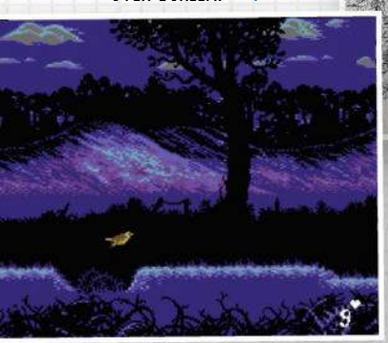


<!--- [PC] GRAPHICS FOR THE WARRENS BEING DRAWN IN PROJECT ONE. --->

<!--- THE CONCEPT SKETCH AND MATCHING SCREENSHOT OF THE GAME OVER SCREEN. --->

<!--- SKETCH FOR THE MANUAL OF THE WILD WOOD. --->

<!--- STUDIES OF A FOX DRAWN BY JOHN TO DEVELOP THE GAME'S CHARACTERS. --->



<!--- [C64] MULTIPLE LEVELS OF PARALLAX SCROLLING GIVE DEPTH TO THE FIELDS. --->

<!--- SKETCH FOR THE FIELDS SECTION OF THE WILD WOOD. --->

The fantastic style also continues to the presentation screens that John has included. "The accompanying bitmaps help to set the overall feel of the adventure," he says. "Every level is introduced with one, like a reward. I draw out an idea on paper with not too much detail and then work closely from that straight into Project One. I hope my natural artistic style comes through even though it uses pixels. An example is the game over screen, where I have stuck quite closely to my original design. There are lots of different types of levels, and many unique locations to work your way through. Boss events and bonus levels are present as well. Some maps are very, very, large (*Turrican*-style), others are more of a shorter stroll in the park." We look forward to going down to the *Wild Wood* soon – visit wildwoodgame.co.uk for more information. </BODY>

<INTRO> OTHER C64 PROJECTS BY THE WILD WOOD'S TEAM </INTRO>

MARBLOID

<This is an unfinished Commodore 64 puzzle game from programmer Artur Bujdoso, who is creating *Wild Wood*'s ending sequence. />

PARALLAXIAN

<Jon Woods created impressive parallax effects for *Wild Wood* and the forthcoming *Defender*-style shoot-'em-up called *Parallaxian*. />

PLANET X-2.1

<An updated version of The 8-Bit Guy's real-time strategy game, with presentation screens including this game over picture by John. />

<!--- [PICO-8] CLIMBING UP THE FIRST SCREEN OF LEE: DRAGON FURY. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amiga:** Jotd has unleashed his version of *Karate Champ VS* at bit.ly/karatechamp-amiga />

<**Amstrad CPC:** Onevision, Lunoka and JMB have produced an enhanced version of Ocean's *Mario Bros*. Try it at bit.ly/mariobros-cpc />

<**Atari 8-bit:** *Tenebra Extended* is now available for Atari fans, thanks to Haplo. Name your own price and buy it from bit.ly/tenebra />

<**C64:** Station, dude! Check out *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure*, converted by Roman Werner with music by Nordischsound. This most excellent game is at bit.ly/billted-c64 />

<**DOS:** Raphnet has updated his CGA game *Orbital Salvager*. Choose what you pay and go salvaging at bit.ly/orbit-salvager />

<**Game Boy:** Asobi.tech made its *Super Jet Pak DX* game (also compatible with Game Boy Color) available for free at bit.ly/superjetpak />

<**Mega Drive:** After it was successfully funded on Kickstarter, PSCD Games is offering a free demo of *Hunter Girls* – bit.ly/huntergirls – with physical cartridges to be on sale later. />

<**MSX:** Two games recently released are *Duckstroma Part 2* from AB UltraNarwhal (bit.ly/duckstroma) and *Virgil's Purgatory v2* by Amaweks (bit.ly/virgil-msx) – and both games have ZX Spectrum versions available at those links. />

<**PICO-8:** Paul Hammond's latest (see top) is the brilliant *Lee: Dragon Fury*, inspired by the classic *Bruce Lee*. Buy it from bit.ly/lee-pico8 />

<**PLUS/4:** A superb conversion of *Stunt Car Racer* is now available to enjoy. You'll find it at bit.ly/stuntcar-plus4 />

<**SNES:** Infidelity has converted the original *The Legend Of Zelda* to the 16-bit console – as well as a conversion of the NES classic *Duck Tales*. Find them both at bit.ly/zelda1-snes />

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CHAMPION CODER

UNDER 4MHZ

<INTRO> UNDER 4MHZ PRODUCED SEVERAL RECENT MULTIFORMAT PUZZLE TITLES AND HAS MORE GAMES IN DEVELOPMENT </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA WEBSITE: UNDER4MHZ.ITCH.IO FORMAT: MULTIFORMAT PREVIOUS GAMES: VEXED, PEGGED, MAHJONG, KLONDIKE, BLOKTRIS WORKING ON: WOLFENSTEIN MAZE3D (MASTER SYSTEM, GAME BOY), PRINCE OF PERSIA (MSX, COLECOVISION) />

<!--- UNDER 4MHZ HAS CREATED GAMES FOR SEVERAL SYSTEMS. --->

WHEN DID YOU START WRITING HOMEBREW?

<I had a Sega SC-3000H computer as a youth, and this has become my target. I'm inspired to port games from other systems that I wish I'd had on my computer./>

WHAT MAJOR TOOLS ARE YOU USING?

<My games are written in C using SDCC (Small Device C Compiler). I use Emacs as an editor in Ubuntu Linux. One of the challenges with SDCC is that it doesn't support any actual hardware platforms, so I've been forced to add support myself./>

IN WHAT WAY?

<I use Bash scripts to compile resources (maps, images, sprites and music). I wrote tools that convert PNG images to native formats. After the colours are right, I'll use tools I've written to deal with attribute clash. />

WHAT ABOUT CREATING MUSIC?

<I've written a tool to convert MIDI files to the sound format on the systems. Some systems have dedicated chips, others have a beeper. For the Spectrum, I've written my own code. For sound effects, sometimes I copy them from existing games, or I copy effects by looking at the sound in Audacity and manually going through the frequency chart – a method I used for replicating the sounds in *Wolfenstein 3D*./>

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE?

<Each system has its own quirks; finding and then interpreting the information can be quite difficult. Recently I've been using chibiakumas.com Some systems are tile-based, others are bitmap-based. For bitmap systems that don't have hardware sprites, I've only implemented basic sprites that can fall on 8x8 pixel squares. Most of my games have been tile-based puzzles, so this has worked./>

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

<The last part (finishing a game) is always the most difficult. Invariably I get bored and start working on something new. Games I'm working on, either finished or nearly finished, include: *2048*, *Arkanoid*, *Asteroids*, *Burglar Bill*, *Boulder Dash*, *Columns*, *Frantic*, *Hungry Horace*, *Minesweeper*, *Pac-Man*, *Paradroid*, *Pipedream*, *Pitman 2*, *Strip Poker*, *Prince Of Persia*, *Snake*, *Ultima 3* and *Lemmings*./>

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM 128] CHANGING BACKGROUNDS AND RUSSIAN ICONOGRAPHY ADD TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF BLOKTRIS. --->

<!--- [GAME BOY] MAZE3D IS A PORT OF THE CLASSIC WOLFENSTEIN. --->

DATA BURST

SAM'S JOURNEY

Retro Gamer Sizzler

<INFO FORMAT: NES/FAMICOM CREDITS: POLY.PLAY (PUBLISHER), KNIGHTS OF BYTES (DEVELOPER) PRICE: DIGITAL TBC, BOXED CARTRIDGES FROM €60 WEB: KNIGHTSOFBYTES.GAMES / BIT.LY/SAMSJOURNEY-PREORDER />

<BODY> **The Sizzler-rated C64 original has finally jumped to the NES (see RG230's feature).** Drawn by a huge claw into another land, Sam must collect diamonds and find the key to open the exit door in each area. The map allows Sam to save progress, while pausing or dying means restarting from the nearest flag or entrance. To help Sam explore and find all the hidden items, he can wear numerous costumes: Pirate Sam wields a sword, Ninja Sam can climb walls and Spaceman Sam's jetpack boosts him higher. There are many more to find as well, adding to the fun. Switches and hidden tunnels lead to more secrets, with three trophies per level (dropped by defeating a particular enemy) to be found. Finally, reaching the exit reveals the percentage of the level completed (based on diamonds, coins and trophies).

The incredibly cute graphics and stylish smooth-scrolling backgrounds have lots of variety, while Sam's different costumes are great fun to use. Finding everything across the game's 30 huge levels also ensures plenty of longevity. It's also worth mentioning Alexander Ney's soundtrack, which is filled with brilliant, atmospheric tunes and some great sound effects. Careful programming means no speed difference between NTSC and PAL versions, and control always feels spot on. This is as playable as the top NES platformers and deserves a place in your collection. </BODY>

SCORE: 95%

<!--- [NES] THE GORGEOUS LEVEL MAP, WITH SAM CURRENTLY IN HIS PIRATE DISGUISE. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] COLLECTING ALL THE "LALDY" TOKENS IS VITAL TO COMPLETING THE GAME. --->

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] SAVAGE PRINCESS 2'S GORGEOUS LOADING SCREEN. --->

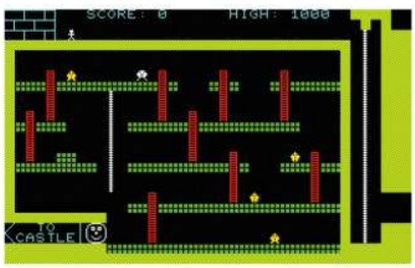
SAVAGE PRINCESS 2

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K) CREDITS: KEVIN MCGRORTY (KEEZEES) PRICE: TBC
WEB: BITMAPSOFT.CO.UK (PHYSICAL TAPE) / MONSTERS-LEGS.ITCH.IO (DIGITAL) />

<BODY> **Cthulhu has attacked Kilbaddie and set it on fire, waking up the hungover Princess Ava.** She can use her sword to attack enemies or deflect incoming arrows, while crates and corpses can be stacked to reach higher platforms. Falling into the water, colliding with an enemy, or being swiped by a tentacle (temporarily disabled with a sword swipe) sends the princess back to the nearest entrance to try again. Setting sail on her boat, The Sausage, sees an eldritch demon try to destroy it, before reaching the Corpse City of R'lyeh where Cthulhu himself must be defeated. This top-notch and humorous sequel makes great use of MPAGD and even berates you for the number of times you died! </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] COLLECTING ALL THE "LALDY" TOKENS IS VITAL TO COMPLETING THE GAME. --->



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] SAVAGE PRINCESS 2'S GORGEOUS LOADING SCREEN. --->

BEYOND

<INFO FORMAT: SHARP MZ-700 CREDITS: SHARPWORKS (PUBLISHER) PRICE: £8 CASSETTE
WEB: SHARPWORKS.ONLINEWEB.SHOP />

<BODY> **Created by Paul Heritage and Paul Stringer back in 1985 and failing to find a publisher, dedicated MZ-700 label Sharpworks have finally released this interesting platform game.** The adventurer must make their way through four screens, collecting ten keys on each screen to unlock part of a crown. With the crown reformed, returning through the screens to the start reveales the passageway to the hidden Dark Crystal and ultimate victory. Although its graphics and sound are simple and reflect their age, this is a demanding and well-made platformer for a lesser-known system. </BODY>

SCORE: 78%

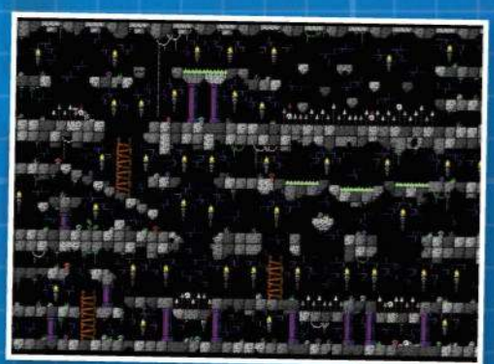
PROCESSING

<INTRO> ANDY VAISEY HOWLS AT THE MOON WITH THE C64 GAME CHILL3R, INSPIRED BY A MASTERTRONIC CLASSIC </INTRO>

<BODY> **"The plan was to release in 2024 – the 40th anniversary of the original *Chiller*," says Andy about his incoming game.** "I've learned a great deal about coding since *Chiller 2*, so I wanted to include things I wouldn't have been able to do back then. The story sees the boy from *Chiller 2* abducted by a monster and the girl must save him."

Disk-only *Chill3r* has 12 connected screens per stage and Andy is hoping for five stages, giving sixty screens plus some hidden areas to discover. "*Chill3r* isn't just about grabbing crosses," explains Andy. "Other things to collect include Ankhs, coins, apples to boost energy and keys. In Normal mode, crosses appear in the same place every game; in Random mode, they appear in different locations – that's for expert players! I'm hoping to include a small story intro along with an ending. I'm also working on my RPG-lite *Lost Realms Of Murkasada* series, a C64 port of my Amiga puzzle game *Spheroid* and with my C64 group Arkanix Labs on our massive RPG *Crimson Twilight*." Look out for a review when *Chill3r* is eventually released. </BODY>

<!--- [C64] AN EXCLUSIVE GLIMPSE OF CHILL3R'S WAREHOUSE LEVEL. --->



<!--- [C64] THE MAP IN DEVELOPMENT FOR LEVEL 2, THE CASTLE. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [NES] The flagpoles in *Super Mario Bros* have become as synonymous with the series as Goombas and mushrooms.

MARIO MEMORIES

The Retro Gamer team revisit the games of Nintendo's iconic superstar

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Mario is arguably one of the most recognisable videogame stars on the planet and has appeared in some of the greatest platformers of all time. With the recent release of *Super Mario Wonder*, the team felt like paying tribute to gaming's most famous plumber.

DARRAN

What's your earliest memory of a *Mario* game?

TIM

Playing *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* in Jeffers toy shop in Portadown on one of those demo stations. And then crying because my mum wouldn't let me spend money on a really cool *Battle Of The Planets* toy. Gutted!

NICK

Donkey Kong for the Atari 2600 was one of the very first games I ever played, but does that really count, given that I didn't know it was a *Mario* game back then?

DARRAN

Let's say no, Nick. I remember wanting *Super Mario Bros* as they had it on display at a local Boots. What makes the series so popular still?

> "Super Mario Land was the defining Mario game for me as a kid"
> NICK THORPE

NICK

I think it's partly the fact that Mario and his friends make for a fine cast of characters – especially Yoshi, he's brilliant – but mostly it's the game design. Relative to everything else in the mid-Eighties, *Super Mario Bros* had tighter controls, more variety and plenty of cool secrets to find.

TIM

And that enticing music as well. Do-do-do etc.

DARRAN

Yeah, I've always enjoyed the music in *Mario* games and never feel it's given the praise it deserves. I actually remember *Super Mario Bros 3* being a huge deal. When I was working at Tesco, three of the women on the delicatessen counter were obsessed with it and wanted me to give them tips so they could impress their husbands. I couldn't help though as I was already playing the import version of *Super Mario World*. What a game that was.

NICK

Mario games have that effect on people. I remember my mum telling me that my friend's parents had developed a bad habit of playing *Super Mario World* until the early hours of the morning, and that's why their SNES got "lost" for a while.

TIM

Mario games didn't have that effect on me, mainly because I didn't have a Nintendo console until the GameCube…

DARRAN

That's fair enough, Tim. *Super Mario 64* was huge when it arrived in 1996 and I knew I had to own a copy. What's your recollections of it, Nick?

NICK

I remember playing it in a shop, and I actually bounced off it hard. The concept of a hub world was totally alien to me, so I just wandered around the castle grounds for a bit with no idea of what my goal was, before getting bored and walking away.

DARRAN

Before we move on, what did everyone think of Mario's handheld adventures? Personally, I thought *Super Mario Land* was ace. I love *Super Mario 3D Land* as well.

NICK

Apart from *Super Mario World*, *Super Mario Land* was the defining *Mario* game for me as a kid. I still love it today – I ran through it again on my 3DS not too long ago. It's a pity the GBA never got an original *Mario* platformer.

» [Nintendo 64] *Super Mario 64* was a huge deal, for platformers and 3D games in general.

» [Nintendo DS] Tim enjoyed the partner-swapping antics of *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time.*

» [Game Boy] Nick and Darran both have fond memories of playing *Super Mario Land.*

» [Wii] Darran gave *Super Mario Galaxy 2* 100% in this very magazine. He has no regrets

» [SNES] The addition of Yoshi in *Super Mario World* was great. He even went on to star in his own games.

» [NES] If you listen very carefully you'll hear Tim, humming along to the music.

TIM

I completed *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time* on the DS when it came out. That was pretty nifty and surprisingly funny.

DARRAN

That's a good shout on *Partners In Time*, Tim. In fact the *Paper Mario* games and the handheld spin-offs have always been decent. Did you enjoy any of them, Nick?

NICK

I enjoyed going through *Super Paper Mario* with my university housemates. For some reason, seeing the perspective shift from 2D to 3D in the first trailer really grabbed me and I had to have it.

DARRAN

Yeah, that's a decent game, although it's not as RPG-focussed as I'd personally like. Generally, I feel Mario's 3D adventures have always been benchmarks with the exception of *Super Mario Sunshine*. Does anyone else agree with that?

NICK

I'd broadly agree with that, *Galaxy* was fantastic and *Odyssey* was very inventive too. The only one I'd maybe say wasn't quite there was *Super Mario 3D World* – it was very well made, just perhaps not quite as inventive as the top-tier *Mario* games?

TIM

I probably agree with that. *Odyssey* looked good in the advertisements, but I haven't played it. I did see the film, though maybe that was just another advert…

DARRAN

The best part of that film was when an advert for some *Mario* games appeared right before it started and a little kid at the front of the cinema shouted out, "Look, Mum! It's fucking Mario!" Personally, I thought the movie was fine. Did anyone enjoy *New Super Mario Bros*? I loved the first, but wasn't too keen on the sequels.

NICK

Yeah, the *New Super Mario Bros* sub-series became oddly bland, which is something you never normally associate with *Mario* games. I'm glad *Super Mario Bros Wonder* looks to be moving on from that and getting a bit weird.

DARRAN

Agreed, any game where you can morph into an elephant is fine with me.

MEMORIES OF MARIO

Readers look back at their favourite games

TreinChickje
Yoshi's Island on the SNES. The beautiful hand-drawn graphics and inventive use of Mode 7 make this one really special. It kept you playing by throwing new gameplay ideas at you the entire time. It was so different at the time and truly peak Nintendo.

Oblisky
Super Mario World – 2D level design at its absolute finest. Nothing comes close.

Blitzwing
If compilations count, then *Super Mario All-Stars* on SNES. I think it remains one of the most replayable games of all time.

Jet Set Willy Nilly
It's between *Odyssey* and *Sunshine*. I'll settle for the former although it's FLUDDy close. [Very good - Ed]

Luke The Fox VA
It might be *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins* which I played on the Game Boy in 1998. Fighting Wario is great as he can use the same power-ups against you.

Jason
Super Mario Galaxy. The Wii was my first Nintendo console I bought on launch, so when a *Mario* game was released I knew I had to buy it. And it's an absolute stellar game. Still holds up now and I completed it again when it was released on the Switch.

Jaz Rignall
EA Sports' *Mario Andretti Racing.* [There's always one – Ed]

Alex Harford
Super Mario World is platforming perfection to this day.

sjp
Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins. I spent hours playing it with a friend on the Game Boy whilst staying at Center Parcs.

Stephen
Super Mario World for me, but a special shout-out has to go to *Super Mario Bros U.* The best one since *World* in my opinion.

Llama King
Super Mario Brothers 3. It's the perfect platformer with iconic music, great visuals, superb gameplay and tons of hidden secrets to find.

Laoisy Thongs
Super Mario World. Super Mario Bros 3 comes in close, but adding Yoshi as a companion in the mix was the quintessential addition to a *Mario* game in the Nineties.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SUPERSTAR SEYMOUR

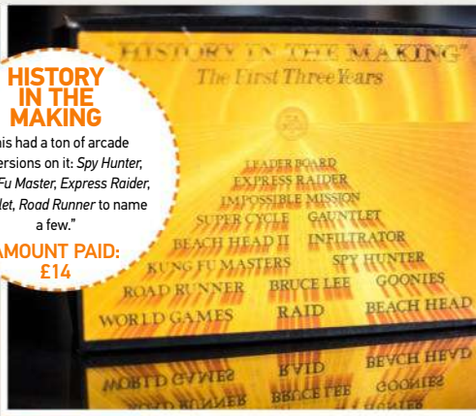
"This box set has become somewhat difficult to find in recent years – I talked a mate into selling it as a favour and that took about two years!"

AMOUNT PAID: £25

THEY SOLD A MILLION II

"This was the first compilation I ever got in 1987. I bought it from France so the shipping cost me a bit extra."

AMOUNT PAID: £15



HISTORY IN THE MAKING

"This had a ton of arcade conversions on it: *Spy Hunter, Kung-Fu Master, Express Raider, Gauntlet, Road Runner* to name a few."

AMOUNT PAID: £14

BIO

NAME:
Shaun M Neary

LOCATION:
Dublin, Ireland

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£3,750

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Amstrad CPC 464

FAVOURITE GAME:
Bruce Lee

WEBSITE:
shaunneary.com

COMPILATION CRAZY

Collections of games within a collection of games

Shaun Neary has hundreds of games but take a look at his collection and it might not be immediately obvious. That's because most of them are bundled within big box compilations – a great money saver back in the day that typically extended the shelf life of four, or sometimes many more, titles at a time.

Growing up with very little money in the late-Eighties and having a birthday two weeks away from Christmas Day, Shaun would get most of his games this way. "I've been an arcade junkie for most of my life," he says. "After a year of owning my Amstrad CPC 464, I discovered that arcade conversions were being produced for the computer so I'd wait a few months before my favourites appeared on compilations, sometimes 10 or 15 at a time."

Most of Shaun's childhood games were left behind at his old family home. "I thought I didn't need any of it anymore because I had an emulator," he explains. In 2017, however, Shaun decided he wanted to snap up most of the compilations he had when he was younger. "Fast forward to 41-year-old me itching to be able to hit CTRL+Small Enter, Play and then any key, and down the rabbit hole I went," he says.

Shaun is pushing 48 now and his collection takes pride of place in his home. He has classics such as *The Magnificent Seven* which included *Head Over Heels, Cobra, Short Circuit, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Arkanoid, Wizball, The Great Escape* and a bonus game in *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* spread over two cassettes. He has compilations packed with *Dizzy* games, the *Virtual Worlds: The 3D Game Collection* from Domark and loads of bumper packs.

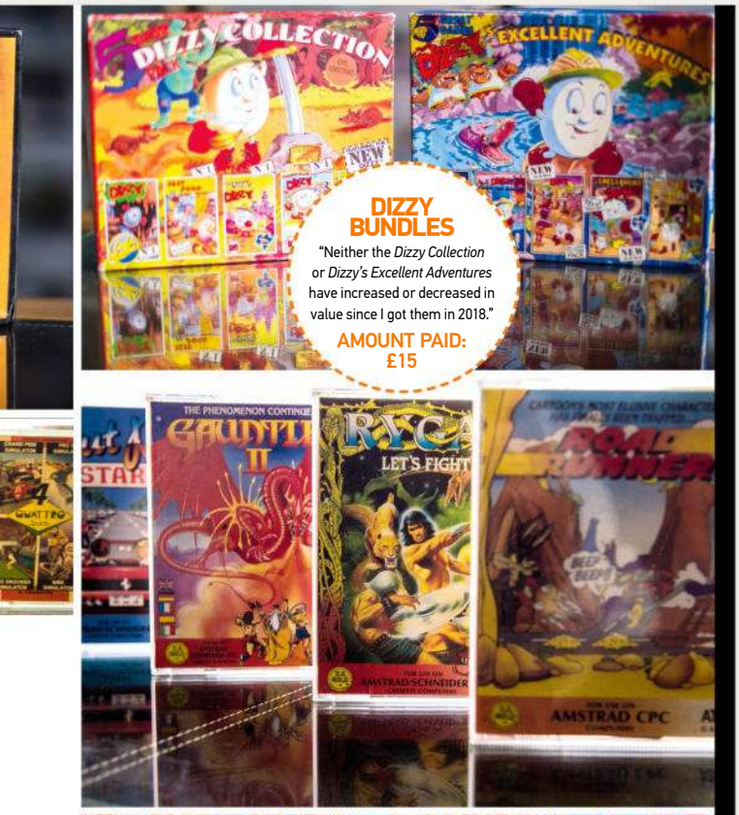
"The *Konami Arcade Collection* released in 1988 is a favourite," he says. "It was a ten-game set by Imagine which expanded on a collection released the previous year and there are some real Amstrad gems on that: *Shao-lins Road, Nemesis* and *Ping Pong* to name a few. I also loved *They Sold a Million II* which comprised of *Bruce Lee, Knight Lore, Match Day* and *Match Point*. I'd gotten hospitalised in 1987 less than a week later and my entire hospital stay was me yearning to get out and go back to playing *Bruce Lee*."

Throw in US Gold's *History In The Making* and Shaun says there's no finer trio of compilations. "All of them had such a variety of genres, movie tie-ins and sports – combine them and it's very difficult to not find something for everyone. Of course, compilations would also have a dud or two but that was always going to be par for the course."

Other gems in Shaun's collection include the mega-cheap *Quattro* compilations by Codemasters, a fledgling collection of mid-Eighties US Gold arcade licences and lots of Amstrad hardware. "That started with a 6128 Plus donated by a friend," he says. "I then wanted a CPC 464 again." This collection has extended to a CPC 6128 and a 464 Plus, "It was initially junk with a missing tape deck cover, Spanish keyboard and UK stickers over some keys." Shaun also has two GX4000 consoles "in case one dies" and he beats himself up for leaving a CPC 664 behind at his family home, "If only I knew then what I know now."

Ironically, as time has gone by, compilations and computers have become more expensive to source. "It can be a heartbreaking experience, especially with some of the prices," Shaun says. "But if you're determined to source your bucket list, you'll get about 90% of the way in my experience."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



DIZZY BUNDLES

"Neither the *Dizzy Collection* or *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* have increased or decreased in value since I got them in 2018."

AMOUNT PAID: £15

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DONKEY KONG

■ "It's not a compilation but I used to play this game to death. There's a disk version too but that's as rare as hen's teeth so best of luck finding it."

PAID: £10

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

As we're focussing on Mario this month, we've decided to pick a collection of his best games. A complete, boxed copy can set you back anywhere from **£20** to **£90,** depending on condition, and loose copies can easily be found for **£10** or less. The version containing *Super Mario World* costs a lot more, especially if boxed.

GOLF

If you're looking to take a shot at bagging yourself a boxed copy of this Atari 2600 classic complete with a manual then you'll only drive a **£15** hole in your pocket.

BOULDER DASH

We've seen *Boulder Dash* fetching as much as **£35** on cassette in a clamshell case for the C64 and we'd expect the disk version to go for a lot more. Happy hunting.

THE LOST PATROL

Although a pair of loose Amiga disks recently sold for **£30,** it is possible to grab a complete boxed copy of this survival-themed strategy game with instructions for much less.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER'S HIDDEN TREASURE

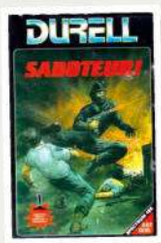
Copies of this 1993 PAL Mega Drive platformer can be bought for between **£8** and **£27,** depending on whether it comes with a manual. Loose carts sell for about **£3.** The Genesis edition is a little costlier.

MORTAL KOMBAT II

This game is regularly on sale for the Mega Drive so you won't need to fight for a copy. Expect to pay around **£30** for a PAL copy and look out for those that include a poster for completist sake.

KATAMARI DAMACY

Namco's roll-'em-up wasn't released in the UK, but the recent remaster means that it's an inexpensive import when it comes up – look to pay around **£20** for a US copy of the game.



SABOTEUR

Prices depend on the version you're after. In general you'll get this game for the ZX Spectrum for about **£5.50,** paying a little less for the Encore re-release.

HOW MUCH?!

DUCK HUNT

A sealed Hong Kong version of *Duck Hunt* was listed on eBay with a Buy It Now price of **£42,637.61!** And, yes, there were postage costs on top of that! And, yes, it's still for sale as we went to press.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

DAYS OF PLAY

Martyn Carroll recalls his first magazine roles

Hands up, I'm a bit of a fanboy when it comes to the PlayStation. Sony's first console got me back into gaming, after a few years away, and each new PlayStation has been a day-one purchase. I have two consoles beneath my living room TV – an original backwards-compatible PS3 and a PS5 – and between them they give me access to every PlayStation generation.

Of those generations, my absolute favourite is the PS2. In March 2000, in the same week Sony launched the PS2 in Japan, I started my first proper job at Live Publishing, a new startup based outside Macclesfield. At the time the company solely produced PC tech magazines, but the plan was to launch console titles once the PS2 was out in Europe. So I sat tight, writing about Excel and Winamp and whatnot, until the company launched *TipStation* in 2001. As the title suggests, this was a PlayStation tips 'n' cheats mag, and I jumped at the chance to work on it. Finally, I was getting paid to play videogames for a living. I recall updating my Friends Reunited profile to boast about the fact.

I soon discovered that solutions mags like *TipStation* were not exactly embraced by game publishers. We asked (begged) them for games ahead of release, so we could produce the guides in advance and have them in the mag for when the game came out, but got nothing. Our workaround was importing. We'd order copies of games like *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Final Fantasy X* from the US, as they were released several months before they showed up in Europe. Everyone hated staggered releases except us.

Things finally changed when we launched *PSG 24-7*, a proper PS2 reviews mag, in 2002. The new title's editor, Dan Whitehead, got in his smart Ford Escort convertible and did a whistle-stop tour of all the main publishers. I remember him coming back from Sony, walking into the office with a 'Test' PS2 under one arm (this was a special debug console that would run unsigned, pre-release code) and a stack of games in the other.

The door was opened and, without exaggeration, the postie would deliver new discs from publishers almost every day from then on. Some contained game assets, but most were actual games, at alpha or beta stage for previewing purposes, or final code for reviewing. Now you can imagine, as a PlayStation fanboy, religiously buying Future's *Official PlayStation Magazine* monthly and checking the GameSpot website daily for the latest game news, this was borderline divine. That Test PS2 was *hammered*.

Not all of the games were gold, but I do remember playing some fascinating previews. Konami in particular used to send us multiple early builds of games and the highlight of these was *Silent Hill 3*. I loved the first two games so I was all over the third one, and those previews were eye-opening. The game was still incomplete and when playing you'd get to a point when it just stopped… and you had to wait for the next build to arrive in the post. The save files were not compatible between builds, so I had to start over each time and I began to notice changes and differences as I played. Fast forward 20 years and if I was writing a feature about the making of *Silent Hill 3*, those previews would provide amazing first-hand insight into the game's development.

> "Finally, I was getting paid to play videogames..."
> MARTYN CARROLL

I don't have those discs now and neither does anyone else at Live Publishing. What happened is rather tragic. In early 2005, *PSG 24-7* was closed after 17 issues and a few of us were tasked with cleaning out that area of the office. All of the discs we'd received over the years were stored in a large filing cabinet – and a collective decision was made to bin the whole lot. What I can't quite rationalise is that I was *editing* ***Retro Gamer*** *by this time*, so I was surely the one person in the room to pipe up and say, "Hang on! There's history in them drawers!" But no. Hundreds of discs, straight to landfill. In my head there was clearly a huge disconnect between the relatively ancient games we were writing about in **RG** at the time and the modern PS2 era.

I've since discovered a few of those discs among my possessions, but they're just a fraction of what we had. I hope mag teams at other publishers were more foresightful with the gaming history we were afforded, but I doubt it.

CONSOLE YOURSELF

THE OTHER PERKS OF WORKING ON VIDEOGAME MAGAZINES

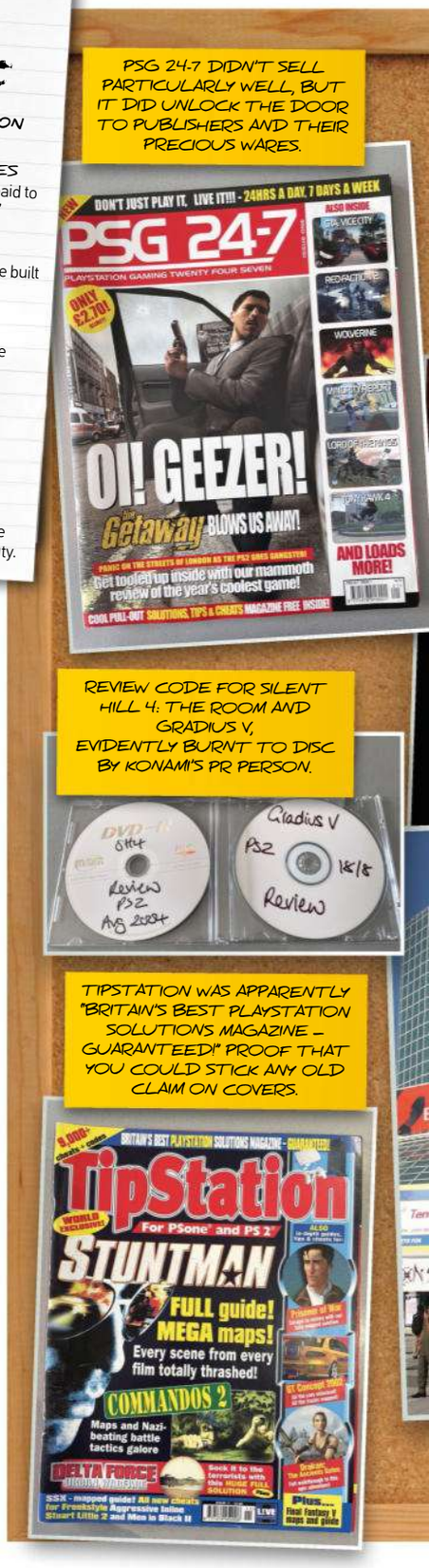
GETTING PAID TO PLAY GAMES
Friends would always ask, "Do you really get paid to play games?" and I would answer, "Yeah!"

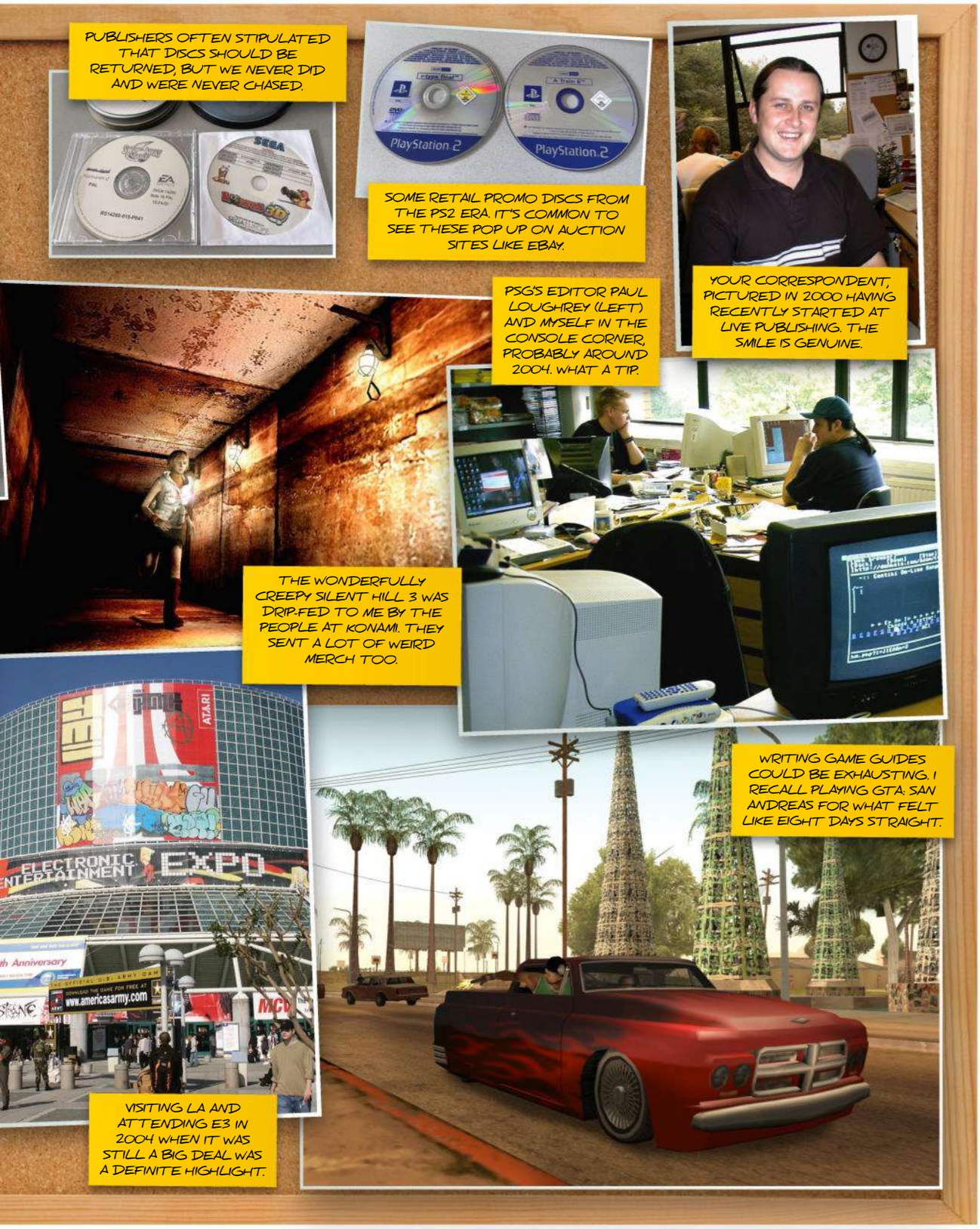
FREE MAGAZINES
Live subscribed to all its competitors' titles so we built up a nice little videogame mag library.

PRESS TRIPS
Getting wined and dined by some shovelware publisher. It happened far too often. Hic.

INDUSTRY EVENTS
Visiting shows like ECTS and E3 on company expenses, under the auspices of 'work'.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL DEATHMATCHES
Playing *Quake III Arena* and *Counter-Strike* on the office LAN at lunchtimes. It used to get quite shouty.


PSG 24-7 DIDN'T SELL PARTICULARLY WELL, BUT IT DID UNLOCK THE DOOR TO PUBLISHERS AND THEIR PRECIOUS WARES.
PSG 24-7
OI! GEEZER!
The Getaway BLOWS US AWAY!
AND LOADS MORE!
REVIEW CODE FOR SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM AND GRADIUS V, EVIDENTLY BURNT TO DISC BY KONAMI'S PR PERSON.
Gradius V
Review
TIPSTATION WAS APPARENTLY "BRITAIN'S BEST PLAYSTATION SOLUTIONS MAGAZINE – GUARANTEED!" PROOF THAT YOU COULD STICK ANY OLD CLAIM ON COVERS.
TipStation
For PSone and PS 2
STUNTMAN
FULL guide!
MEGA maps!
COMMANDOS 2
DELTA FORCE


PUBLISHERS OFTEN STIPULATED THAT DISCS SHOULD BE RETURNED, BUT WE NEVER DID AND WERE NEVER CHASED.
SOME RETAIL PROMO DISCS FROM THE PS2 ERA. IT'S COMMON TO SEE THESE POP UP ON AUCTION SITES LIKE EBAY.
YOUR CORRESPONDENT, PICTURED IN 2000 HAVING RECENTLY STARTED AT LIVE PUBLISHING. THE SMILE IS GENUINE.
PSG'S EDITOR PAUL LOUGHREY (LEFT) AND MYSELF IN THE CONSOLE CORNER, PROBABLY AROUND 2004. WHAT A TIP.
THE WONDERFULLY CREEPY SILENT HILL 3 WAS DRIP-FED TO ME BY THE PEOPLE AT KONAMI. THEY SENT A LOT OF WEIRD MERCH TOO.
WRITING GAME GUIDES COULD BE EXHAUSTING. I RECALL PLAYING GTA: SAN ANDREAS FOR WHAT FELT LIKE EIGHT DAYS STRAIGHT.
VISITING LA AND ATTENDING E3 IN 2004 WHEN IT WAS STILL A BIG DEAL WAS A DEFINITE HIGHLIGHT.

THE PS2 IN PRINT

Readers recall their favourite PS2 magazines

Retro Game Den
I was an avid reader of the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* and bought it every month. The bundled demo disc was a great way to try out new games, when I didn't have the spare cash to take a risk on an otherwise unknown game.

Merman
The only one I bought was *OPM2*, which was good for the time, mainly because of the official status and the access it gave.

Simon Richard Pophale
All the *Official PlayStation Magazines* are great but I do think the PS2 era ones were the best. They had a good balance of substance and style. I also felt that a few of the other magazines went down the lowest common denominator route by aping the 'lad mag' style which I couldn't stand. *OPM2* kept it about the games.

Marc Jowett
PlayStation Power. A magazine I stuck with from the PS1 era, although it didn't last much longer after the launch of the PS2 as it was absorbed into *PlayStation Max*. I then went on to *Play*.

Stuart Gipp
PSM2 had a great sense of fun and community about it, as well as genuinely good, thorough and interesting coverage. I still giggle when I remember some of the daft jokes from the issue 50 retrospective feature.

Richard Davey
It was *OPM2* for me, mostly because of the amazing coverdisc content. I also still remember that superb *Red Faction* cover with the bullet holes going through it.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

» The CPI inflation calculator has the Amiga 500 at over £1,700 in today's money. You could buy a Switch, Xbox One Series X and PS5 and still have money to spare.

INFLATION NATION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Whilst having a catch-up on your fantastic magazine, issue 231 to be specific, something dawned on me as I was reading Hot Topic. My cousin, whose dad had chosen an A500 as the family computer, was very much in the minority. Seven-year-old me didn't really register that I knew *no one* else who owned one. I'd spent hours playing *Street Fighter II Turbo*, all the *Dizzy* games and *Speedball 2* to name but a few, with no idea about what a privilege it was.

It got me thinking about what our parents were spending on computers back then, inflation adjusted. Darran's point about the A500 being a hideously expensive machine was bang on – £499 in 1988 in today's money equates to £1,711 pounds (respect for my uncle instantly shot up!) I also realised that when my dad excitedly presented me with a brand-new Amstrad CPC 464 Plus with a colour monitor after picking me up from school one day, he had just spent the 1991 equivalent of £903. Now would I build my 12-year-old son a gaming PC for £1,700 or £903 these days just because I felt like it? Well, no, so maybe we didn't have it that bad after all.
Ed, Colchester

You're quite right about the cost of home computers back then, Ed. Darran remembers his nan missing bingo for a year so she could pay off the Amstrad CPC 464 with a green-screen monitor he received for his 14th birthday. That's over £700 in today's money, which equates to a lot of missed bingo.

STAR LETTER

GAMES WITHIN GAMES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I was playing *Animal Crossing* on the GameCube the other day and enjoying the many NES games it contains. Then it hit me, when did this stop happening? It seemed like loads of games used to have classic games hidden within them during the era of the PS2 and earlier generations, but now it seems to rarely happen. It would be fantastic if you could run a feature covering all these hidden gems, as I'm sure it would make for fascinating reading. Off the top of my head I can think of *Out Run* in *OutRun 2*, the *Ninja Gaiden* arcade game in Team Ninja's Xbox reboot and I know there's a load of *Sonic* Game Gear games in the GameCube version of *Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut*, but I'm sure there are plenty more.

It would be wonderful if you could share them with myself and other readers. I look forward to the article.
Simon Baker

What a great little idea, Simon. Classic games do occasionally pop up in modern games (the *Yakuza* series is a good example of this) but we'd imagine that online stores make it easier for publishers to sell those games for cash instead. An article called Retro Treasure tackled this very subject all the way back in issue 14, so it's probably something we should revisit for the benefit of newer readers. Have a bookazine for such a good suggestion.

» [Switch] Weirdly, while retro games are widely available in Sega's *Yukuza*'s series, once-free *Sonic* games are now released as additional DLC.

» Issue 250 was a big success and has been one of our best-selling issues. Thanks for the support!

PS – I particularly enjoy reading about upcoming homebrew titles and Collector's Corner!

Thanks so much for the kind words, Paul. Mental health can be debilitating for those who suffer from it, as well as the friends and family that are affected by it, so we'll never shy away from talking about it when necessary. The more conditions are talked about, the more they can be understood and accepted.

MENTALLY AWARE

Dear Darran,
Special thanks to you and your team for the latest celebratory issue of **Retro Gamer**. I've been reading **Retro Gamer** on and off for years now and issue 250 has been my favourite so far. The writing was excellent, as were all of the features (old and new). I particularly appreciate that there is a wholesomeness to it all, especially in the letters section when anyone mentions mental health.
Please keep up the good work!
Paul Everton

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Despite working in IT my whole adult life, gaming stopped being of huge importance to me after my Amiga. I've read **Retro Gamer** since issue 1 and watched as **RG** has evolved to encompass much more modern technology than what I'm interested in. But I can cope as long as there's still enough in the magazine to keep me engaged. What I can't cope with (and the straw that broke the camel's back for me) was yet another *Jet Set Willy* article in the latest issue. With so much untouched 8-bit and 16-bit stuff out there it really hit home as lazy.

However, rather than just being negative, how about an idea. One of my favourite discontinued

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» [Oric-1] Allan would like to see more obscure home computers covered in the magazine. Look out for some suitable articles in the future.

magazines was *Micro Mart*. It would cover so-called 'dead' systems and the AmigaMart page was always the first one I turned to. Could you not do this in **Retro Gamer**? You could have an 8-bit section covering more than just the usual stuff (when was the last time the Oric or TRS-80 or MSX got a mention?). 16-bit from that era could be covered and maybe a non-UK section too, as there's so much from the US, Japan, Eastern Europe and South America that's never covered. The numerous Retro Revival spreads that take up a lot of space could be easily replaced with sections I've mentioned without affecting ad revenue.

I hope this is taken in the spirit it was intended. Like everyone else, I appreciate the love and effort made to produce the current magazine, which I enjoy.

Many thanks,
Allan Caldwell

Thanks so much for writing in, Allan. We've not actually written a *Jet Set Willy* article for nearly four years, but we can appreciate it's a game that's been a popular subject for the magazine. While we won't be dropping the Retro Revivals any time soon, your request has given us an idea and you can look at more obscure systems being covered in future Minority Reports, as well as bespoke articles.

CRAVING ATARI

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Did you ever print an updated version of *The Atari Book 40th Anniversary Special* for Atari's recent 50th anniversary? If so, how can I order one?
Thanks,
Tim Sitkiewicz

As far as we're aware Tim, the bookazine department hasn't created such a book. If it ever does, we'll mention it in the magazine so you don't miss it.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Dredge

Darran recently discovered the Team17-published *Dredge* and he's gone absolutely mad for it. He plays it religiously each evening, trading fishing tips with his brother and trying to collect every fish that's in the game. Meanwhile Tim's been opening the many, many doors in *Starfield*, though he did catch all the fish in *Sea Of Stars*.

» There's been no new book to celebrate Atari's anniversary, but issue 240 had plenty of Atari coverage to celebrate the landmark achievement.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Mario moment?

Benno de Swaffelaar
When Mario sacrifices Yoshi to make a jump.

Anton Gale
The part where retro gamers use the title screen of *Super Mario World* to show off their PVM.

Jet Set Willy Nilly
The ghostly piano from *Super Mario 64*. Even playing it again on the Switch, knowing it was coming, still made me jump!

osmos 0
As someone who grew up playing *Super Mario Galaxy*, I just admire the sense of freedom and exploration in the many strange locales the ex-plumber has visited. (Add to it the music.) He proved that 3D platforming is possible, playable AND enjoyable, and 28 years later, he has yet to fail.

myst+
Getting the same card at the end of a level three times in a row in *Super Mario Bros 3*. There's something so satisfying and triumphant about it!

SunnySaigon
Giant World in *Super Mario Bros 3*. Back in the day it was like my world was expanding.

Ben Wilson
So many to choose from. But discovering the warp room in 1-2 of the original *Super Mario Bros* has to top the list. The sheer audacity of being able to run along the score display put a smile on my face that's still there well over 30 years later.

Ryan Smith
My favourite game, *Mario* or otherwise, is *Super Mario Bros 3* and I'll never forget when seven-year-old me became Raccoon Mario for the first time and took flight.

Joruus
Easy. Playing *Super Mario 64* for the first time.

Robert August De Meijer
Reading about the minus world in Nintendo Power. It made me realise that games can, and should, be broken by the player.

TheGoldPope
Playing *Super Mario World* for the first time, and hearing the music change when you ride Yoshi was absolutely game-changing.

retro GAMER

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Soulcalibur IV

FEEL THE FARCE

» RETROREVIVAL

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If ever you need a way to pep up your franchise, guest characters, particularly those from other franchises, are a sure way to generate some interest. Namco first took this approach in 2002 when it added an exclusive character to the home-console versions of *Soulcalibur II*. Spawn appeared on Microsoft's Xbox, Heihachi could be found on PlayStation 2, while GameCube owners arguably benefitted the most thanks to the inclusion of Link. Sure, it was a little annoying that each character was locked to a specific console, but it did make sense from an exclusivity point of view.

Namco took a similar approach with *Soulcalibur IV* in 2008, but this time the inclusion of classic *Star Wars* characters felt a little more egregious. While the Apprentice from *The Force Unleashed* was available on both the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions of the game, Yoda was confined to Microsoft's Xbox 360, while Darth Vader was exclusive to Sony's PS3. This eventually changed three months after *Soulcalibur IV*'s July release date, when they were available for a nominal fee, but it always rankled me.

Let's face it, back in the days of yore, extra characters would be available upon completing the game, or purchasable with in-game currency. The introduction of digital services allowed publishers to take full advantage and they began locking these once-free extras behind paywalls instead – which many of us still happily paid for. While *Soulcalibur IV* certainly wasn't the first game to adopt this trend, it was one I particularly remember because of my enjoyment of the *Star Wars* series.

After the farcical nonsense that was *Star Wars: Masters Of Teräs Kesäi*, iconic *Star Wars* characters were now connected to a genuinely great combat system. They felt right at home with the classic *Soulcalibur* characters as well, and I'm pretty sure we gave it a decent score on release. It is frustrating though that if you end up picking up *Soulcalibur IV* many years from now and the required digital stores are no longer available you'll be missing out on either Yoda or Darth Vader, despite the fact they're already on the disc. Still, that's progress for you.

ENDGAME

AXELAY

» Konami's *Axelay* is arguably one of the best shmups to grace Nintendo's SNES and features a host of impressive visual effects as well as astonishing bosses. But what happens when you finally defeat the Armada Of Annihilation? Let's skip to the end of the game and find out...

01

» Defeating *Axelay*'s final boss triggers a gigantic screen-filling explosion which threatens to destroy your craft. You might be wearing a flame-retardant combat suit, but it definitely feels like your pants are getting singed.

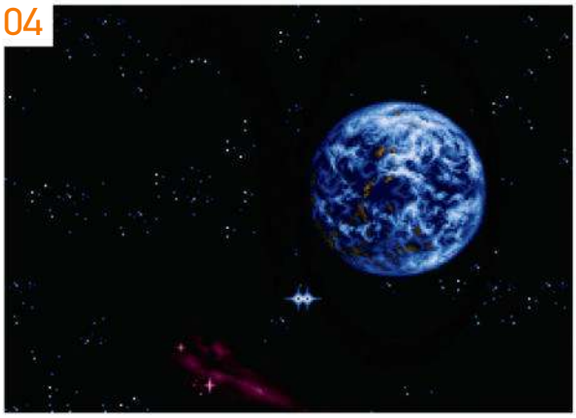
02

» As the smell of burning cotton fills your nostrils you realise you're caught in a dizzying and dangerous spin. Singed pants forgotten, you quickly right yourself and check that all your life support systems are still working.

03

» Your visor is cracked and you're going to need a new pair of pants, but at least you're safe. Peace has been restored to the galaxy and you prepare to return home, mentally making a note to buy yourself some new underwear.

04



» Earth is in your sights and you make arrangements to take some time off so you can fix your damaged suit and buy some new kecks. But before you get the opportunity to return home your commanding officer suggests that the Armada Of Annihilation has a second hidden base.

05

» "But how can you be so sure?" you ask them. "Well there's an on-screen message saying there's going to be a sequel," they bark back at you. "Sort your pants out afterwards, it'll be fine." Konami's promised sequel never arrived and after 31 years it's probably time you changed those Y-fronts.

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